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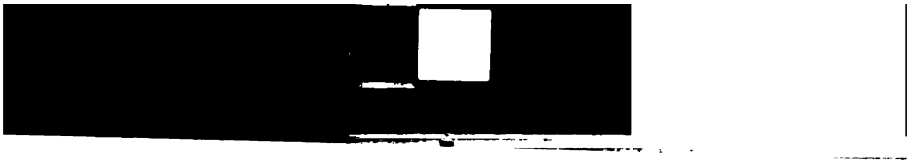

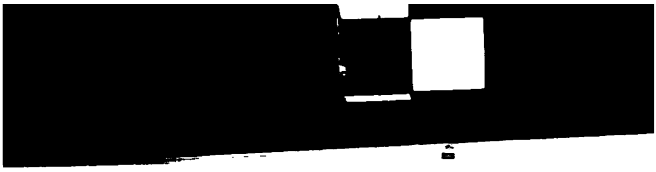

H. DE BALZAC

THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE

(LA RECHERCHE DE L'ABSOLU)

AND OTHER STORIES

TRANSLATED BY

ELLEN MARRIAGE

WITH A PREFACE BY

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PREFACE.

THE volume of the old edition of the "Comédie Humaine," which opened with "The Quest of the Absolute," together with that generally entitled "The Maranas," contains the cream and flower of Balzac as a story-teller; and the first excels the second in showing the fiery heat and glow of the author's imagination. Its principal constituent, the title story, is large enough for a novel by itself. The chief of the minor elements, "The Unknown Masterpiece," has seemed to some the actual masterpiece of the author. "Jésus-Christ en Flandre," like some others of Balzac's short stories, intimates an intention in him of emulating the *contes fantastiques*, half-humorous and half-romantic, half-Voltairian and half-mystical, which were so much in favor in 1830. It is, I think, quite the best of them, and it shows its author's great manner in more points than one. But just as at the end of "L'Elixir de longue Vie" we want the touch of Hoffmann rather than that of Balzac; so here we find something that is not quite perfect, that wants another hand. Even as it is, we would not change for anything else, but we have the sense that the same thing by another person might have been even better. "Melmoth réconcilie," an inferior thing in itself, has in the same way a sort of special and adventitious interest.

I do not know that I admire "The Red House" quite so much as some of the other contents of the volume. It has interest; and it may be observed that, as indicating the origin of Taillefer's wealth, it connects itself with the general scheme of the "Comédie," as few of the others do. But it is an at-

tempt, like one or two others of Balzac's, at a style very popular in 1830, a sort of combination of humor and terror, of Sterne and Monk Lewis, which is a little doubtful in itself, which has very rarely been done well, and for which he himself was not quite completely equipped.

But "The Quest of the Absolute" is, as has been said, a novel in itself. Taking minor points only, it is a masterpiece. That there is a certain parallelism, probably unconscious, between the way in which Balthazar Claes as unconsciously kills his wife and the way in which Monsieur Grandet kills his, is certainly no drawback to the book; for the repetition, if it is a repetition, only shows how genius can repeat. Indeed, there is the same demonstration contained in the same books in the representation of the diverse martyrdoms of Madame Claes and her daughter Marguerite, fatal in the former case, happily changed in the latter. In no book is Balzac's faculty of Dutch drawing, as far as scenes and details go, more brilliantly shown; in none are the minor characters—from the *famulus* Le Mulquinier, with his fatal belief in his master's madness, downwards—better; while Marguerite Claes and her mother, especially Marguerite, are by common consent to be ranked among Balzac's greatest triumphs in portraying "honest women."

But these things, though they illustrate the general principle that the presence of a great central interest and figure will radiate greatness and interest on its surroundings, would contribute comparatively little to the effect of the book if it were not for the seeker after the absolute himself. Nowhere, perhaps, has the hopeless tyranny of the fixed idea, the ferocious (not exactly selfish) absorption in the pursuit of a craze, been portrayed with quite the same power as here. And we know and feel that the energy, the fire, the perfection of the handling are due to sympathy—that Balzac a few generations earlier would have sought the Philosopher's Stone with the same desperate energy as Balthazar. Probably nothing but his prior

attachment to literary work prevented him from doing something similar; while actually, as it was, he kept himself in lifelong difficulties by no very different persistence in the corresponding, if more ignoble, game of speculation.

I have just said that the tyranny of the ideal has nowhere been more successfully portrayed than in "The Quest of the Absolute;" but there is perhaps one exception, and it is "The Unknown Masterpiece," which should be carefully compared with the larger fiction. The attraction of this wonderful and terrible piece for all who have anything to do with the things of the spirit, whether in the way of criticism or in the way of creation, can hardly be exaggerated. I remember many years ago spending half an evening in discussing, in a sort of amœbean strain, its merits with the late Mr. Stevenson; and everybody knows the compliment which a distinguished American writer has paid it by attempting a sort of paraphrase of its original. The same interest is present here and in "The Quest," but it is a little complicated, a little refined upon. Here, too, there is the sorcery of the ideal, the frenzied passion for attainment and perfection. But here there is a special *nuance* almost as closely connected with Balzac's individuality as the general scheme. We know that the mania of constant retouching, of adding strokes, was a danger of his own; that he did actually indulge in it to an extent very prejudicial to his pecuniary interest, and perhaps not always advantageous to the effect of his work, though the artist in words is hardly exposed to any such absolutely hopeless catastrophe in such a case as is the artist in line and color.

Yet, wonderful as this is, it cannot in its limited space, and with its intensely concentrated interest, vie with the amplitude, the variety, the dignity of "The Quest." Balzac might have made this too long: he was not always proof against that temptation. But in it, as in "Eugénie Grandet," with which it has been already compared, he has hit the exact mean be-

tween a short tale and a long novel, has not sinned by digression and episode, has hardly sinned by undue indulgence in detail. The interest is perhaps remoter from the general human understanding than that of "Eugénie" and one or two others. But it is handled with equal mastery, and the effect is at least equally good.

It is not, of course, that a knowledge of Balzac's own peculiarities adds anything to the sense of the artistic eminence of these two stories. That would be clear if we knew nothing whatever about the other part of the matter. But it cannot be regarded as uninteresting that we should thus know the secret of the *furia*, the "nobler gust" of sympathy and enjoyment with which the writer, consciously or unconsciously, must have set about these two great and, in his own work, almost incomparable things.

"The Quest of the Absolute" appeared in 1834, with seven chapter-divisions, as a "Scène de la vie privée;" was published by itself in 1839 by Charpentier; and took its final place as a part of the "Comédie" in 1845.

G. S.

THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE.

To Madame Josephine Delannoy, née Doumerc.

Madame, may God grant that this, my book, may live longer than I, for then the gratitude which I owe to you, and which I hope will equal your almost maternal kindness to me, would last beyond the limits prescribed for human affection. This sublime privilege of prolonging the life in our hearts for a time by the life of the work we leave behind us would be (if we could only be sure of gaining it at last) a reward indeed for all the labor undertaken by those who aspire to such an immortality. Yet again I say—May God grant it!

De Balzac.

THERE is in Douai, in the Rue de Paris, a house that may be singled out from all others in the city; for in every respect, in its outward appearance, in its interior arrangements, and in every detail, it is a perfect example of an old Flemish building, and preserves all the characteristics of a quaint style of domestic architecture thoroughly in keeping with the patriarchal manners of the good folk in the Low Countries. But before proceeding to describe the house, it may not be wholly unnecessary here to enter, on behalf of authors, a protest in favor of those didactic preliminaries for which the ignorant and impatient reader has so strong a dislike. There are persons who crave sensations, yet have not patience to submit to the influences which produce them; who would fain have flowers without the seed, the child without gestation. Art, it would seem, is to accomplish what nature cannot.

It so happens that human life in all its aspects, wide or narrow, is so intimately connected with architecture, that with a certain amount of observation we can usually reconstruct a bygone society from the remains of its public monuments. From relics of household stuff, we can imagine its owners "in their habit as they lived." Archæology, in fact, is to the body social somewhat as comparative anatomy is to animal organizations. A complete social system is made clear to us by a bit of mosaic, just as a whole past order of things is implied by the skeleton of an ichthyosaurus. Beholding the cause, we guess the effect, even as we proceed from the effect to the cause, one deduction following another until a chain of evidence is complete, until the man of science raises up a whole bygone world from the dead, and discovers for us not only the features of the past, but even the warts upon those features.

Hence, no doubt, the prodigious interest which people take in descriptions of architecture so long as the writer keeps his own idiosyncrasies out of the text and does not obscure the facts with theories of his own; for every one, by a simple process of deduction, can call up the past for himself as he reads. Human experience varies so little that the past seems strangely like the present; and when we learn what has been, it not seldom happens that we also behold plainly what shall be again. As a matter of fact, we can seldom see a picture or a description of any place wherein the current of human life has once flowed without being put in mind of our own personal experience, our broken resolutions, or our blossoming hopes; and the contrast between the present, in which our heart's desire is never given to us, and the future, when our wishes may be fulfilled, is an inexhaustible source of melancholy or delightful musings. How is it that Flemish art, with its pictures of Flemish life, makes an almost irresistible appeal to our feelings whenever the little details are faithfully rendered? Perhaps the secret of the charm lies in

this—that there seems less uncertainty and perplexity in this matter-of-fact life than in any other. Such art could hardly exist without the opulent comfort which comes of a prosperity of long use and wont; it depicts an existence peaceful to the verge of beatitude, with all its complicated family ties and domestic festivals; but it is no less the expression of a tranquillity wellnigh monotonous, of a prosperity which frankly finds its happiness in self-indulgence, which has nothing left to wish for, because its every desire is gratified as soon as it is formed. Even passionate temperaments, that measure the force of life by the tumult of the soul, cannot see these placid pictures and feel unmoved; it is only shallow people who think that because the pulse beats so steadily the heart is cold.

The energy that expends itself in a sudden and violent outbreak produces a far greater effect on the popular imagination than an equal force exerted slowly and persistently. The crowds have neither the time nor the patience to estimate an enormous power which is uniformly exerted; they do not reflect on appearances; they are borne too swiftly along the current of life; it is therefore only transcendent passion that makes any impression upon them, and the great artist is most extolled when he exceeds the limits of perfection: Michel Angelo, Bianca Cappello, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Beethoven, Paganini—you may pass their names in review. It is only a rare and great power which knows that there must be no overstepping of the limit line, that sets in the first place that quality of symmetry, that completeness which stamps a perfect work of art with the profound repose which has so strong a charm for those who are capable of recognizing it. But the life adopted by this practical people is in all respects the ideal life of the citizen as conceived of by the lower classes; it is a bourgeois paradise in which nothing is lacking to fill the measure of their felicity.

A highly refined materialism is the distinguishing characteristic of Flemish life. There is something dull, dreary, and

unimaginative about English "comfort;" but a Flemish interior with its glowing colors is a delight to the eyes, and there is a blithe simplicity about the homeliness of Flemish life; evidently the burden of toil is not too heavily felt, and the tobacco-pipe shows that the Flemings have grasped and applied the Neapolitan doctrine of *far niente*, while a tranquil appreciation of art and beauty in their surroundings is no less evident. In the temper of the people, indeed, there are two of the most essential conditions for the cultivation of art: patience, and that capacity for taking pains which is necessary if the work of the artist is to live; these are pre-eminently the characteristics of the patient and painstaking Fleming. The magical splendor, the subtle beauty of poetry, are attainments impossible for patience and conscientiousness, you think? Their life in Flanders must be as monotonously level as the lowlands of Holland, and as dreary as their clouded skies! But it is nothing of the kind. The power of civilization has been brought to bear in every direction—even the effects of the climate have been modified.

If you notice the differences between the products of various parts of the globe, it surprises you at first that the prevailing tints of the temperate zones should be grays and tawny-browns, while the brilliant colors are confined to tropical regions—a natural law which applies no less to habits of life. But Flanders, with her naturally brown and sober hues, has learned how to brighten the naturally foggy and sullen atmosphere in the course of many a political revolution. From her old lords, the Dukes of Burgundy, she passed to the Kings of Spain and France; she has been forced to seek allies in Holland and in Germany, and Flemish life bears witness to all these changes. There are traces of Spanish dominion in their lavish use of scarlet, of lustrous satins, in the bold designs of their tapestry, in their drooping feathers and mandolins, in their stately and ceremonious customs. From Venice, in exchange for their linen and laces, they received

the glasses of fantastic form in which the wine seems to glow with a richer color. From Austria they received the tradition of the grave and deliberate diplomacy which, to quote the popular adage, "made three steps in a bushel basket."

Their trade with the Indies has brought them in abundance the grotesque inventions of China and the marvels of Japan. But with all their receptiveness, their power of absorbing everything, of giving out nothing, and of patiently enduring any yoke, Flanders could hardly be regarded as anything but an European curiosity shop, a mere confusion of nationalities, until the discovery of tobacco inaugurated a new era. Then the national character was fused and formed out of all these scattered elements, and the features of the first Fleming looked forth at last upon the world through a cloud of tobacco-smoke. Ever since that time—no matter for their frontiers and their lands divided piecemeal—there is no question of the solidarity of the Flemings; they are one nation, thanks to the tankard and the tobacco-pipe.

So Flanders, with its practical turn, has constantly assimilated the intellectual and material wealth of its masters and neighbors, until the country, originally so dreary and unromantic, has recast its life on a model of its own choosing, acquiring the habits and manners best suited to the Flemish temperament without apparently losing its own individuality or independence. The art of Flanders, for instance, did not strive after ideal forms; it was content to reproduce the real as it had never been reproduced before. It is useless to ask this country of monumental poetry for the verve of comedy, for dramatic action, for musical genius, for the bolder flights of the epic or the ode; its bent is rather for experimental science, for lengthy disputations, for work that demands time, and smells somewhat of the lamp. All their researches are of a practical kind, and must conduce to physical well-being. They look at facts and see nothing beyond them; thought must bear the yoke and be subservient to the needs of life; it

must occupy itself with realities, and never soar above or beyond them. Their sole conception of a national career was a sort of political thrift, their force in insurrection was the outcome of an energetic desire to have sufficient elbow-room at table and to take their ease beneath the eaves of their *steedes*.

It was this love of comfort, together with the independent attitude of mind which is a result of prosperity, that led them first to feel that desire for liberty which, later on, was to set all Europe in a ferment. Moreover, there is a dogged tenacity about a Fleming and a fixity of idea which makes him grow dangerous in the defence of his rights. They are a thorough people; and whether it is a question of architecture or furniture, of dykes or agriculture or insurrection, they never do things by halves. No one can approach them in anything they set themselves to do. The manufacture of lace, involving the patient cultivation of flax and the still more patient labor of the worker, together with the industry of the linen weaver, have been the sources of their wealth from one generation to another.

If you wished to paint stability incarnate, perhaps you could not do better than take some good burgomaster of the Low Countries for model; a man not lacking in heroism, and, as has often been seen, ready to die in his citizen fashion an obscure death for the rights of his *Hausa*.

But the grace and poetry of this patriarchal existence is naturally revealed in a description of one of the last remaining houses, which at the time when this story begins still preserved the traditions and the characteristics of that life in Douai.

Of all places in the department of the Nord, Douai (alas!) is the town which is being modernized most rapidly; modern innovations are bringing about a revolution there. Old buildings are disappearing day by day, old-world ways are almost forgotten in the widespread zeal for social progress.

Douai now takes its tone, its ways of life, and its fashions from Paris; in Douai there will soon be little left of the old Flemish tradition save its assiduous and cordial hospitality, together with the courtesy of Spain, the opulence and cleanliness of Holland. The old brick-built houses are being replaced by hôtels with white-stone facings. Substantial Batavian comfort is disappearing to make way for elegant frivolity imported from France.

The house in which the events took place, which are to be described in the course of this story, was almost half-way down the Rue de Paris, and has borne in Douai, for more than two hundred years, the name of the "Maison Claes."

The Van Claes had formerly been among the most celebrated of the families of craftsmen who founded the commercial prosperity of the Netherlands. For many generations Claes succeeded Claes as the Dean of the great and powerful Guild of Weavers in Ghent. When Charles V. endeavored to deprive the city of its privileges and Ghent rose in revolt, the wealthiest of the Claes found himself so deeply compromised that, foreseeing the inevitable end and the fate reserved for him and his companions, he sent away his wife and children and valuables under a French escort, before the city was invested by the Imperial troops. Events proved that the fears of the Dean of the Guild were but too well founded. When the city capitulated, he and some few fellow-citizens were excepted by name from the general amnesty, and the defender of the rights and privileges of Ghent was hanged as a rebel against the Empire. The death of Claes and his companions bore its fruits; in the years to come these useless cruelties were to cost the King of Spain the best part of the Netherlands. Of all seed sown on earth, the blood of the martyrs is the surest, and the harvest follows soonest upon the sowing.

While Philip II. visited the sins of revolted Ghent upon its children's children, and ruled Douai with a rod of iron, the Claes (whose vast fortunes were unimpaired) connected them-

selves by marriage with the elder branch of the noble house of Molina, an alliance which repaired the fortunes of that illustrious family, and enabled them to purchase back their estates; and the broad lands of Nourho, in the kingdom of Leon, came to support an empty title. After this, the course of the family fortunes was sufficiently uneventful until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the family of Claes, or rather the Douai branch of it, was represented in the person of M. Balthazar Claes-Molina, Count of Nourho, who preferred to style himself simply Balthazar Claes. Of all the vast wealth accumulated by his ancestors who had kept so many looms at work, and set in motion so many wheels of commerce, there remained to Balthazar an income of about fifteen thousand livres, derived from landed property in and around Douai, the house in the Rue de Paris, and its furniture, which was worth a little fortune. As for the estates in Leon, they had caused a lawsuit between Molina of Flanders and Molina of Spain. The Molinas of Leon gained the day, and assumed the title of Counts of Nourho, although in truth it belonged to the elder branch, the Flemish Claes; but bourgeois vanity in the Belgian house rose superior to Castilian pride.

When, therefore, formal designations were registered, Balthazar Claes put off the rags of Spanish nobility to shine with all the lustre of his descent from citizens of Ghent. The instinct of patriotism was so strong in the exiled families that until the very end of the eighteenth century the Claes remained faithful to family traditions, manners, and customs. They only married into the most strictly bourgeois families, requiring a certain number of aldermen, burgomasters, or the like civic dignitaries among the ancestors of the bride-elect before receiving her among them. Now and then a Claes would seek a wife in Bruges or Ghent, or as far away as Liége, or even in Holland, that so the old domestic traditions might be kept up. Their circle became gradually more and more

restricted, until towards the end of the last century it was limited to some seven or eight families of municipal nobility, wearers of heavy-hanging, toga-like cloaks, who combined the dignified gravity of the magistrate with that of the Spanish grandee, and whose manner of life and habits were in harmony with their appearance. The family of Claes was looked on by the rest of the citizens with a kind of awe that was almost superstitious. The unswerving loyalty, the spotless integrity of the Claes, together with their staid, impressive demeanor under all circumstances, had given rise to a sort of legend of the Claes, and the "Maison Claes" was as much an institution in the city as the Fête de Gayant. The spirit of old Flanders seemed to fill the old house in the Rue de Paris, in which lovers of municipal antiquity would find a perfect example of the unpretending houses which the wealthy burghers of the Middle Ages built for themselves to dwell in.

The principal adornment of the house front was the great doorway with its folding leaves of oak, studded with large nails, arranged in groups of five; in the centre the Claes had proudly carved their arms, two spindles conjoined. The pointed archway was of sandstone, and was surmounted by a little statuette of St. Genevieve with her spindle, set in a sort of shrine with a cross above it. The delicate carving about the shrine and the doorway had grown somewhat darker by the lapse of time; but so carefully had it been kept by the owners of the house, that every detail was visible at a passing glance. The clustered shafts in the jams on either side the doorway had preserved their dark gray color, and shone as if their surfaces had been polished. The windows were all alike. The sill was supported by a richly-carved bracket, the window frame was of white stone and in the form of a cross, so that the window itself was divided into four unequal parts, the two lower lights being nearly twice the size of the upper. Each of the upper divisions was surmounted by an arch, which sprang from the height of the central mullion. These

arches consisted of a triple row of bricks, each row jutting out above the one beneath it by way of ornament; the bricks in each row, moreover, alternately projected and receded about an inch, so as to form a sort of checquer pattern. The small lozenge-shaped panes were set in exceedingly slender reticulating bars, which were painted red.

For the sake of added strength a course of white stone was built at intervals into the brick walls, which were jointed with white mortar, and the corners of the house were constructed of white stone quoins.

There were two windows on the ground floor, one on either side of the door, five in the first story, and but three in the second, while the third immediately beneath the roof was lighted by a single circular window, divided into five compartments, and faced with sandstone. This window was set in the centre of the gable like a rose window over the arched gateway of a cathedral.

The weathercock on the ridge of the roof was a spindle filled with flax. The two sides of the great gable rose stepwise from the height of the first story, and at this departing point a grotesque gargoyle on either side discharged the rainwater from the gutters. All around the base of the house there ran a projecting course of sandstone like a step. Finally, on either side, between the window and the door lay a trap-door, heavily bound and hinged with iron scroll-work, a relic of the days of yore.

Ever since the house had been built the front had been carefully scoured twice a year; not a particle of mortar came loose or fell out but was immediately replaced. The costliest marbles in Paris are not kept so clean and so free from dust as the window-bars, sills, and outside stonework of this Flemish dwelling. The whole house front was in perfect preservation. The color of the surface of the brick might be somewhat darkened by time, but it was as carefully kept as an old picture or some book-lover's cherished folio—treasures

that would never grow old were it not for the noxious gases distilled by our atmosphere, which no less threaten the lives of their owners. The clouded skies of Flanders, the dampness of the climate, the absence of light or air caused by the somewhat narrow street, soon dimmed the glories of this periodically renewed cleanliness, and, moreover, gave the house a dreary and depressing look. A poet would have welcomed a few blades of grass in the openwork of the little shrine, and some mosses on the surface of the sandstone; he might have wished for a cleft or crack here and there in those too orderly rows of bricks, so that a swallow might find a place in which to build her nest beneath the red triple arches of the windows.

There was an excessive neatness and smoothness about the house front, worn with repeated scourings; an air of sedate propriety and of grim respectability which would have driven a romantic writer out of the opposite house if he had been so ill advised as to take up his abode there. This air of propriety and respectability was simply fatal to the spirit of romance.

When a visitor had pulled the wrought-iron bell handle that hung by the side of the door, and a maidservant from some inner region had opened the heavy folding-doors, they fell to again with a clang that echoed up into the lofty roof of a great paved gallery, and died away in remote murmurs through the house. You would have thought that the doors had been made of bronze. From the gallery, which was always cool, with its walls painted to resemble marble, and its paved floor strewn with fine sand, you entered a large square inner court paved with glazed tiles of a greenish color. To the left lay the kitchens, laundry, and servants' hall; to the right the wood-house, the coal-cellars, and various offices. Every window and door was ornamented with carving, which was kept exquisitely spotless and free from dust. The whole place was shut in by four red walls striped with bars of white stone, so that the daylight which penetrated into it seemed in

its passage to take a faint red tint, which was reflected by every figure, and gave a mysterious charm and strange unfamiliar look to every least detail.

On the further side of this courtyard stood that portion of the house in which the family lived, the *quartier de derrière*, as they call it in Flanders, a building exactly similar to the one facing the street. The first room on the ground floor was a parlor lighted by four windows; two looked out upon the courtyard, and two upon a garden, a space of ground about as large as that on which the house was built. Access to this garden and to the courtyard was given by two opposite glass doors, which occupied the same relative position as the street door; so that as soon as a stranger entered the whole house lay before him, as well as a distant vista of the greenery at the further end of the garden beyond it.

Visitors were received in that portion of the house which looked out upon the street, and strangers were lodged in apartments in the second story; but though these rooms contained works of art and costly furniture, there was nothing which, in the eyes of Claes himself, could be compared with the art treasures that filled the rooms which had been the centre of family life for centuries, and a discerning taste would have confirmed his judgment. The historian should not omit to record of the Claes who died for the cause of freedom in Ghent, that he had accumulated nearly forty thousand silver marks, gained by the manufacture of sail-cloths for the all-powerful navy of Venice. The Flemish craftsman was a man of substance, and had for his friend the celebrated wood-carver, Van Huysium, of Bruges. Many times the artist had had recourse to his friend's purse. When Ghent rose in revolt, Van Huysium, then himself a wealthy man, had secretly carved for his old friend a piece of paneling of massive ebony, on which he had wrought the story of Van Artevelde, the brewer who for a little while ruled over Flanders. This piece of woodwork consisted of sixty panels, and contained about

fourteen hundred figures; it was considered to be Van Huysium's masterpiece.

When Charles V. made up his mind to celebrate his entry into the city which gave him birth by hanging twenty-six of its burghers, the victims were consigned to the custody of a captain, who (so it was said) had offered to connive at Claes' escape in return for these panels of Van Huysium's, but the weaver had previously sent them into France.

The parlor in the house in the Rue de Paris was wainscoted entirely with these panels. Van Huysium, out of respect for the memory of the martyr, had come himself to set them in their wooden framework, painted with ultramarine, and covered with a gilded network, so that this is the most complete example of a master whose least fragments are now worth their weight in gold. Titian's portrait of Claes in the robes that he wore as President of the Tribunal des Parchons looked down from the chimney-piece; he still seemed to be the head of the family which regarded him with veneration as its great man. The chimney-piece, itself originally plain stone, had been reconstructed of white marble during the eighteenth century. A venerable timepiece stood upon the ledge between two five-branched candle-sconces, tortuous, elaborate, and in the worst possible taste, but all of massive silver. The four windows were draped with crimson brocaded damask curtains, covered with a dark flowered pattern, and lined with white silk; the furniture had been re-covered with the same material in the time of Louis XIV. The polished floor was evidently modern—large squares of white wood, with slips of oak inserted between them, but the ceiling yet preserved the peculiarly deep hues of Dutch oak. Perhaps it had been respected because Van Huysium had carved the masks on the medallions bordered with scrolls which adorned it.

In each of the four corners of the parlor stood a short column, with a five-branched silver sconce upon it, like those upon the chimney-piece, and a round table occupied the

centre of the room. Several card tables were ranged along the walls with much precision; and on the white marble slabs of two gilded console tables stood, at the time when this story begins, two glass globes full of water, in which gold and silver fish were swimming above a bed of sand and shells.

The room was sombre, and yet aglow with color. The ceiling of dark oak seemed to absorb the light, and to give none of it back into the room. If the sunlight pouring in from the windows that looked out into the garden scintillated from every polished ebony figure on the opposite wall, the light admitted from the courtyard was always so faint that even the gold network on the other side looked dim in the perpetual twilight.

A bright day brought out all the glories of the place; but, for the most part, its hues were subdued and soft, and, like the sombre browns and reds of autumn forests, they took brighter hues only in the sun. It is unnecessary to describe the "Maison Claes" at further length. Many of the scenes in the course of this story will, of course, take place in other parts of the house, but it will be sufficient for the present to have some idea of its general arrangement.

On a Sunday afternoon towards the end of August, in the year 1812, a woman was sitting in a large easy-chair by one of the windows that looked out on the garden. It was after the time of vespers. The rays of sunlight falling on the side of the house slanted across the room in broad beams, played with fantastic effect on the opposite wall, and died away among the sombre ebony figures of the panels; but the woman sat in the purple shadow cast by the damask curtain. A painter of mediocre ability could not have failed to make a striking picture if he had faithfully portrayed a face with so sad and wistful an expression. The woman was sitting with her feet stretched out before her in a listless attitude; apparently she had lost all consciousness of her physical existence, and one all-absorbing thought had complete possession of her

mind, a thought which seemed to open up the paths of the future just as a ray of sunlight piercing through the clouds lights up a gleaming path on the horizon of the sea. Her hands hung over the arms of the chair; her head, as though it bore a load of thought too heavy, had fallen back against the cushions. She wore a loose cambric gown, very simply made; the scarf about her shoulders was carelessly knotted on her breast, so that the lines of her figure were almost concealed. Apparently she preferred to call attention to her face rather than to her person; and it was a face which, even if it had not been brought into strong relief by the light, would have arrested and fixed the attention of any beholder, for its expression of dull, hopeless misery would have struck the most heedless child. Nothing is more terrible to witness than such anguish as this in one who seldom gives way to it; the burning tears that fell from time to time seemed like the fiery lava flood of a volcano. So might a dying mother weep who is compelled to leave her children in the lowest depths of wretchedness without a single human protector.

The lady seemed to be about forty years of age. She was more nearly beautiful now than she had ever been in her girlhood. Clearly she was no daughter of the land. Her hair was thick and black, and fell in curls over her shoulders and about her face; her forehead was very prominent, narrow at the temples, sallow in hue, but the black eyes flashed fire from beneath her brows, and she had the dark pallor of the typical Spaniard. The perfect oval of her face attracted a second glance; the ravages of smallpox had destroyed the delicacy of its outlines, but had not marred its graciousness and dignity; at times it seemed as if the soul had power to restore to it all its pristine purity of form. If pride of birth was revealed in the thick tightly-folded lips, there was also natural kindliness and graciousness in their expression; but the feature which gave most distinction to a masculine type of face was an aquiline nose. Its curve was somewhat too strongly marked, the result,

apparently, of some interior defect; but there was a subtle refinement in its outlines, in the thin septum and fine transparent nostrils that glowed in the light with a bright red. She was a woman who might, or might not, be considered beautiful, but no one could fail to notice the vigorous yet feminine head.

She was short, lame, and deformed; she had married later than women usually do, and this partly because it was insisted that her slow-wittedness was stupidity; yet more than one man had read the indications of ardent passion and of inexhaustible tenderness in her face, and had fallen completely under the spell of a charm that was difficult to reconcile with so many defects. She bore in many ways a strong resemblance to the Spanish grandee, her ancestor, the Duke of Casa-Real. Perhaps the force of the charm which romantic natures had erewhile found so tyrannous, the power of a fascination that sways men's hearts, but is powerless to rule their destinies, had never in her life been greater than now, when it was wasted, so to speak, on empty space. She seemed to be watching the gold fish in the glass before her, but in truth her eyes saw nothing, and she raised them from time to time, as if imploring heaven in despair; it would seem that such trouble as hers could be confided to God alone.

The room was perfectly silent save for the chirping of the crickets without; the shrill notes of a few cicadas came in with a breath of hot air from the little garden, which was like a furnace in the afternoon sun. From a neighboring room there came smothered sounds; silver or china rattled, or chairs were moved, as the servants laid the cloth for dinner.

Suddenly the lady started and seemed to listen; she took her handkerchief, dried her eyes, and endeavored to smile; so successfully did she efface all traces of sorrow, that from her seeming serenity it might have been thought that she had never known an anxiety or a care in her life. It was the sound of a man's footstep that had wrought the change. It

ecnoed in the long gallery built over the kitchens and the servants' quarters, which united the front part of the house with the back portion in which the family lived. Whether it was because weak health had so long confined her to the house that she could recognize the least noise in it at once; or because a highly-wrought temperament ever on the watch can detect sounds that are imperceptible to ordinary ears; or because nature, in compensation for so many physical disadvantages, had bestowed a gift of sense-perception seldom accorded to human beings apparently more happily constituted; this sense of hearing was abnormally acute in her. The sound of the footsteps came nearer and nearer. And soon, not only for an impassioned soul such as hers, which can annilhilate time and space at will that so it may find its other self, but for any stranger, a man's step on the staircase which led to the parlor was audible enough.

There was something in the sound of that footstep which would have struck the most careless mortal; it was impossible to hear it with indifference. We are excited by the mere sounds of hurry or flight; when a man springs up and raises the alarm of "Fire!" his feet are at least as eloquent as his tongue, and the impression left by a slow, measured tread is every whit as powerful. The deliberate, heavy, lagging footfall in the gallery would no doubt have irritated impatient people; but a nervous person, or an observer of human nature, could scarcely have heard it without feeling a thrill of something very like dread. Was there any life in those feet that moved so mechanically? It was a dull, heavy sound, as if the floor boards had been struck by an iron weight. The slow, uncertain step called up visions of a man bending under a load of years, or of a thinker walking majestically beneath the weight of worlds. The man reached the lowest stair, and set foot upon the pavement slowly and irresolutely. In the great hall he paused for a moment. A passage led thence to the servants' quarters, a door concealed in the wainscot

gave admittance to the parlor, and through a second parallel door you entered the dining-room.

A light tremor, caused by a sensation like an electric shock, ran through the frame of the woman in the easy-chair; but a sweet smile trembled on her lips, her face lighted up with eager expectation, and grew fair and radiant like the face of an Italian Madonna. She summoned all her strength, and forced back her terrors into some inner depth; then she turned and looked towards the door set in the panels in the corner of the parlor; it flew open so suddenly that the startling sound was quite sufficient to account for and to cover her agitation.

Balthazar Claes appeared and made several paces forward; he either did not look at the woman in the low chair, or if he looked at her, it was with unseeing eyes. He stood upright in the middle of the parlor, his head slightly bent, and supported by his right hand. The smile faded from the woman's face; her heart was pierced by a horrible pang, felt none the less keenly because it had come to be a part of her daily experience; her dark brows contracted with pain, deepening lines already traced there by the frequent expression of strong feeling; and her eyes filled with tears, which she hastily brushed away, as she looked at Balthazar.

There was something exceedingly impressive about the head of the house of Claes. In his younger days he had borne a strong resemblance to the heroic martyr who had threatened to play the part of Artevelde and defied the Emperor, Charles V.; but at the present moment the man of fifty or thereabouts might have been sixty years of age and more; and with the beginnings of a premature old age, the likeness to his great-minded ancestor had ceased. His tall figure was slightly bent; perhaps he had contracted the habit by stooping over his books, or perhaps the curvature was due to the weight of a head over-heavy for the spine. He was broad-chested and square-shouldered; his lower extremities, though

muscular, were thin; you could not help casting about for some explanation of this puzzling singularity in a frame which evidently had once been perfectly proportioned. His thick, fair hair fell carelessly over his shoulders in the German fashion, in a disorder which was quite in keeping with a strange air of slovenliness and general neglect. His forehead was broad and high; the prominence of the region to which Gall has assigned ideality was very strongly marked. The clear, dark-blue eyes seemed to have a power of keen and quick vision, a characteristic often noted in students of occult sciences. The shape of the nose had doubtless once been perfect; it was very long, the nostrils had apparently grown wider by involuntary tension of the muscles in the continual exercise of the sense of smell. The hollows in a face which was beginning to age seemed all the deeper by force of contrast with the high cheek-bones, thickly covered with short hair. The mouth with its gracious outlines seemed, as it were, to be imprisoned between the nose and a short, sharply turned-up chin.

Certain theorists, who have a fancy for discerning animal resemblances in human countenances, would have seen in the long, rather than oval, face of Balthazar Claes a likeness to the head of a horse. There was no softness or roundness about its outlines; the skin was tightly drawn over the bones as if it had shrunk under the scorching influence of a fire that burned within; there were moments when the eyes looked out into space as if seeking for the realization of his hopes, and at such times this fire that consumed him seemed to escape from his nostrils.

There are deep thoughts which seem to be living forces of which great men are the embodiment; some such thought seemed to be visibly expressed in the pale face with its deeply-carved wrinkles, to have scored the furrows on a brow like that of some old king full of cares, and to shine forth most clearly from the brilliant eyes; the fire in them seemed to be

fed by the temperate life which is the result of the tyrannous discipline of great ideas, and by the fires of a mighty intelligence. They were deeply set and surrounded by dark circles, which seemed to tell of long vigils and of terrible prostration of mind consequent on reiterated disappointments, of hopes that sprang up anew only to be blighted, of wear and tear of body and mind. Art and science are jealous divinities; their devotees betray themselves by unmistakable signs. There was a dreamy abstractedness and aloofness in Balthazar Claes' manner and bearing which was quite in keeping with the magnificent head so lacking in human quality. His large hands, covered with hair, were soiled; there were jet-black lines at the tips of the long finger-nails. There was an air of slovenliness about the master of the house which would not have been tolerated in any of its other inmates.

His shoes were seldom cleaned, or the laces were broken or missing. His black cloth breeches were covered with stains, buttons were lacking on his waistcoat, his cravat was askew, his coat had assumed a greenish tint, here and there the seams had given way; everything about him, down to the smallest trifle, combined to produce an uncouth effect, which in another would have indicated the lowest depths of outcast misery, but in Balthazar Claes it was the neglect of genius.

Vice and genius bring about results so similar that ordinary people are often misled by them. What is genius but a form of excess which consumes time and money and health and strength? It is an even shorter road to the hospital than the path of the prodigal. Men, moreover, appear to pay more respect to vice than to genius; for they decline to give it credit or credence. It would seem that genius concerns itself with aims so far remote, that society is shy of casting accounts with it in its lifetime; such poverty and wretchedness are clearly unpardonable. Society prefers to have nothing to do with genius.

Yet there were moments when it would have been hard

to refuse admiration to Balthazar Claes—moments when, in spite of his absent-mindedness and mysterious preoccupation, some impulse drew him to his fellows, and the face of the thinker was lighted up by a kindly thought expressed in the eyes, the hard light in them disappeared, and he looked round him and returned (so to speak) to life and its realities; at such times there was an attractive beauty in his face, a gracious spirit looked forth from it. Any one who saw him then would regret that such a man should lead the life of a hermit, and add that "he must have been very handsome in his youth." A vulgar error. Balthazar Claes had never looked more interesting than at this moment. Lavater would certainly have studied the noble head, have recognized the unwearying patience, the stainless character, the steadfast loyalty of the Fleming, the great and magnanimous nature, the power of passion that seemed calm because it was strong. Such a man would have been a constant and devoted friend, his morals would have been pure, his word sacred; all these qualities should have been dedicated to the service of his country, to his own circle of friends, and to his family; it was the will of the man which had given them a fatal misdirection; and the citizen, the responsible head of a household and disposer of a large fortune, who should have been the guide of his children towards a fair future, lived apart in a world of his own in converse with a familiar spirit, a world in which his duties and affections counted for nothing. A priest would have seen in him a man inspired by God, an artist would have hailed him as a great master, an enthusiast might have taken him for some seer after the pattern of Swedenborg.

As he stood by the window, his ragged, disordered, and threadbare costume was in strange contrast with the graceful dainty attire of the woman who watched him so sadly. A nice taste in dress often distinguishes persons of mental ability or refinement of soul who suffer from bodily deformity. They

are conscious that their beauty is the beauty of mind and soul, and are content to dress simply, or they discover how to divert attention from their physical defects by a studied elegance in every detail. And the woman in the low chair had not only a generous soul, but she loved Balthazar Claes with that woman's intuition which is a foretaste of the intelligence of angels. She had been brought up in one of the noblest families of Belgium, so that even if her taste had not been instinctive it would have been acquired; and, tutored since then by her desire to please the eyes of the man she loved, she had learned to dress herself admirably, and to adopt a style which subdued the effect of her deformity. Moreover, although one shoulder was certainly larger than the other, there was no other defect in her figure. She glanced through the window into the courtyard, and then into the garden, as if to make sure that no one was within hearing, turned meekly to Balthazar, and spoke in the low tones that Flemish women use, for the love between these two had long since conquered Castilian pride.

"You must be very deep in your work, Balthazar? This is the thirty-third Sunday since you have been to mass or vespers."

Claes made no reply. His wife bowed her head, clasped her hands, and waited, watching him the while. She knew that his silence was due neither to contempt nor to indifference, but to the tyranny of an all-absorbing thought. In the depths of some natures the sensitive delicacy of youth lingers long after youth has departed, and Balthazar Claes would have shrunk from uttering any thought that might wound, however slightly, a woman who was always oppressed with the painful consciousness of her physical deformity. And this dread was ever present with him. He understood, as few men do, how a word or a single glance has the power to efface the happiness of whole years; nay, that such words have a more cruel power, because they are utterly at variance with the constant

tenderness of the past; for we are so made that our happiness makes us more keenly sensitive to pain, while sorrow has no such power of intensifying a transitory gleam of joy. After a few moments, Balthazar roused himself, gave a quick glance round him, and said, "Vespers?——Ah! the children have gone to vespers."

He stepped towards the window and looked out into the garden, where the tulips blazed in all their glory. Then he stopped suddenly, as if he had come into collision with a wall, and exclaimed, "Why should they not combine in a given time?"

"Can he be going mad?" his terrified wife asked herself.

If the reader is to understand the interest of this scene, and the situation out of which it arose, it will be necessary to glance over the previous history of Balthazar Claes and of the granddaughter of the Duke of Casa-Real.

Towards the end of the year 1783, M. Balthazar Claes-Molina de Nourho, then twenty-two years of age, might have passed for a "fine gentleman," as we say in France. He had just completed his education in Paris; his manners had been formed in the society of Mme. d'Egmont, a set composed of Frenchmen who came originally of Belgian families, or of Belgians distinguished either by birth or by fortune. Great nobles and persons of the highest fashion, such as the Count of Horn, the Prince of Aremberg, the Spanish Ambassador, and Helvétius were among the Belgian residents in Paris. The young Claes had relations and friends there who introduced him into the great world, just as the great world was about to return to chaos; but, like many young men, he was attracted at first by glory and by knowledge rather than by frivolity. He frequented the society of learned men, waxed enthusiastic for science, and became an ardent disciple of Lavoisier, who was then better known for the vast fortune he had acquired as farmer-general of taxes than for the scientific

discoveries which were to make the name of the great chemist famous long after the farmer-general was forgotten.

But Claes was young, and as handsome as Helvétius, and Lavoisier was not his only instructor. Under the tuition of women in Paris he soon learned to distil the more volatile elixirs of wit and gallantry; and although he had previously thrown himself into his studies with an enthusiasm that had won the commendations of his master, he deserted Lavoisier's laboratory to take final lessons in *savoir-vivre* under the guidance of the arbitresses of good manners and good taste, the queens of the high society which forms a sort of family all over Europe.

These intoxicating dreams of success did not last long however; Balthazar Claes breathed the air of Paris for a while; and then, in no long time, he turned his back on the capital, wearied by the empty life, which had nothing in it to satisfy an enthusiastic and affectionate nature. It seemed to him that the quiet happiness of family life, a vision called up by the very name of his native Flanders, was the life best suited to his character and to the aspirations of his heart. The gilding of Parisian salons had not effaced old memories of the sombre harmonies of the parlor in the old house in Douai, of the little garden, and the happy days of his childhood.

Those who would fain dwell in Paris should have no ties of home or of fatherland. Paris is the chosen city of the cosmopolitan, or of those who are wedded to social ambition; by means of art, science, or political power, they gain a hold on the world which they never relax.

The child of Flanders went back to the house in Douai as La Fontaine's pigeon flew home to its nest. It was the day of the Fête Gayant, and tears came into his eyes at the sight of the procession. Gayant, the Luck of the city, the embodiment of the spirit of old Flemish traditions, had been introduced into Douai since his family had been driven to take refuge there. The Maison Claes was empty and silent; his

father and mother had died during his absence, and for some time family affairs required his presence there.

After the first sorrow for his loss his thoughts turned to marriage. All the sacred ties which bound him to his home and the pieties of the hearth had reawakened a strong desire in him to complete the happy existence of which he had dreamed; he determined to do as his forefathers had done, and went to Ghent, to Bruges, and to Antwerp in search of a bride. He probably had ideas of his own as to marriage, for it had always been said of him from his earliest youth that he never could keep to the beaten track, or do as other people did.

It so fell out that one day while on a visit to one of his relations in Ghent, he heard of a young lady in Brussels concerning whom opinions differed considerably. Some considered that Mlle. Temninck's beauty was quite spoiled by her deformity, others hotly insisted that she was perfection. Among these last was Balthazar Claes' somewhat elderly cousin, who told his guests that, beautiful or no, Mlle. Temninck had a soul which would have induced him to marry her if he had been choosing a wife. And with that he told how she had given up all her claims on the family estate so that her younger brother might make a marriage befitting his rank and name; thus setting his happiness before her own, and sacrificing her life to him, for it was scarcely to be expected that Mlle. Temninck would marry now that she had no fortune and the bloom of youth was past, when no suitor had presented himself for the heiress in her girlhood.

A few days later Balthazar Claes had obtained an introduction to Mlle. Temninck, now a woman twenty-five years of age, and had fallen deeply in love with her. Josephine de Temninck chose to regard this as a passing fancy, and refused to listen to M. Claes; but the influence of passion is very subtle, and in this love for her in a man who had youth and good looks and a straight, well-knit frame, there was something

so attractive to the poor lame and deformed girl that she yielded to it.

Could a whole volume suffice to tell the story of the love that thus dawned in the girl's heart? The world had pronounced her to be plain, and she had meekly acquiesced in the decision, conscious though she was of possessing the irresistible charm which calls forth true and lasting love. And now at the prospect of happiness, what fierce jealousy awoke in her, what wild projects of vengeance if a rival stole a glance, what agitations and fears such as seldom fall to the lot of women, which cannot but lose by being passed over in a few brief words! The analysis must be minute. Doubt, the dramatic element in love, would be the keynote of a story in which certain souls would find once more the poetry of those early days of uncertainty, long since lost but not forgotten. The ecstacy in the depths of the heart which the face never betrays, the fear of not being understood, and the unspeakable joy of a swift response; the misgivings which lead the soul to shrink within itself; the moments when, as if drawn forth by some magnetic power, the soul reveals itself in the eyes by infinite subtle shades; wild thoughts of suicide that arise at a word, only to be laid to rest by a tone in a voice whose vibrations reveal unsuspected depths of feeling; tremulous glances full of terrible audacity; swift, passionate longings to speak or act rendered powerless by their very vehemence; communings of soul with soul in commonplace phrases which owe all their eloquence to the faltering of the voice; mysterious workings of that divine discretion and modesty of soul which is generous in the shade, and finds exquisite delight in sacrifices which can never be recognized; youthful love, in short, with the weaknesses of its strength.

Mlle. Josephine de Temninck was a coquette through loftiness of soul. The painful consciousness of her deformity made her as unapproachable and hard to please as the prettiest of women. She dreaded that a day would come when her

lover would cease to care for her, and the thought awakened her pride and destroyed her confidence in herself. With stoical firmness, she locked away in her inmost heart the first feelings of happiness in which other women love to deck themselves in the eyes of the world. The more love drew her to Balthazar Claes, the less she dared to give expression to love. A glance, a gesture, a question, or a response from a pretty woman would have been flattering to a man; but for her, was not any advance a humiliating speculation? A pretty woman can be herself, people look leniently on her follies or mistakes; but a single glance has power to stop the play of expression on a plain woman's features, to make her still more timid, shy, and awkward. Does she not know that she of all women can afford no blunders; that no indulgence will be extended to her; nay, that no one will give her any opportunity of repairing them? She must always be faultless; does not the thought chill and dishearten her while the constant strain exhausts her powers? Such a woman can only live in an atmosphere of divine indulgence, and where can the hearts be found in which indulgence is not poisoned by a lurking taint of pity?

There is a sort of consideration more painful to sensitive souls than even positive unkindness, for it aggravates their misfortunes by continually giving them prominence. The cruel politeness of society was intolerable to Mlle. de Temninck. She schooled herself into self-repression, forced back into some inner depth the most beautiful thoughts that rose in her soul, and took refuge in an icy reserve of manner and bearing. She only dared to love in secret, and was eloquent or charming only in solitude. She was plain and insignificant in broad daylight, but she would have been a beautiful woman if she could have lived by candlelight. Not seldom she had made perilous trials of Balthazar's love, risking her whole happiness to be the surer of it, disdaining the aid of dress and ornaments, by which the effect of deformity could be softened

or concealed, and the Spaniard's eyes grew full of witchery when she saw that even thus she was beautiful for Balthazar Claes.

Yet even the rare moments when she ventured to give herself up to the joy of being loved were embittered by distrust and fears. Before long she began to ask herself whether Claes wished to marry her that he might have a docile slave, whether he had not some defect which made him content to wed a poor deformed girl. The doubts and anxieties which continually harassed her made those hours unspeakably precious, in which she felt sure that this was a true and lasting love which should make her amends for all the slights of the world. She provoked discussions on the delicate subject of her own plainness, dwelling upon it and exaggerating it that she might the better probe her lover's nature, and came in this way by some truths but little flattering; yet she loved him for the perplexity in which he found himself when she had led him on to say that a woman is most beloved for a beautiful soul and for the devotion which makes the days of life flow on in quiet happiness; that after a few years of marriage a wife may be the loveliest woman on earth or the plainest, it makes no difference to her husband. In support of this theory he had heaped together such truth as lies in various paradoxical assertions that beauty is of very little consequence, till he suddenly became aware of the ungraciousness of his arguments. All the goodness of his heart was revealed by the tact and delicacy with which he gradually changed his ground and made Mlle. de Temninck understand that for him she was perfect.

Perhaps, in a woman, devotion is the highest height of love. Devotion was not wanting in this girl who did not dare to hope that love would not fail. She felt attracted by the prospect of a struggle in which sentiment was to triumph over beauty; there was something great, she thought, in giving herself to love with no blind faith that love would last; and finally, this happiness, brief as it might prove, must cost

her so dear that she could not refuse to taste it. These questionings and inward struggles gave all the charm, all the varying moods of passion to this exalted nature, and inspired in Balthazar a love that was almost chivalrous.

The marriage took place in the beginning of the year 1795. They went back to Douai to spend the first weeks of their married life in the ancestral home of the Claes. The household treasures there had been increased. Mlle. de Temninck brought with her several fine paintings by Murillo and Velasquez, her mother's diamonds, and the splendid wedding presents sent by her brother, who had succeeded to the title, and was now Duke of Casa-Real. Few women were as happy as Mme. Claes. There was not the slightest cloud in the happiness that lasted for fifteen years, a happiness that, like a bright light, transformed even the most trivial details of daily life.

In most men there are inequalities of character which cause continual dissonances, small weaknesses that lead to bickerings, till the harmony of domestic life is spoiled, and the fair ideals perish. One man may be conscientious and hard working, but he is hard and stern; another is good-natured, but obstinate; a third will love his wife sincerely, but he never knows his own mind; while a fourth is so absorbed in his ambitions that he looks on affection as a debt to be discharged, and if he gives all the vanities of fortune he takes all joy out of the day.

Mediocrity, in short, is by its very nature incomplete, though its sins of omission and commission are not heinous. Clever folk are as changeable as the barometer, genius alone is essentially good. Perfect happiness is accordingly only to be found at either extreme of the intellectual scale; there is a like equability of temperament in the good-natured idiot and in the man of genius, arising in the one case from weakness, and in the other from strength of character. Both are capable of a constant sweetness of temper, which softens the roughnesses of life. In the one its source is an easy good-natured

tolerance, and in the other it springs from indulgence; a man of genius, moreover, is the interpreter of a sublime thought, which cannot fail to bring his whole life into conformity with itself. Both natures are simple and transparent; the one because of its shallowness, the other by reason of its depth. Clever women, therefore, are sufficiently ready to take a dunce as the best substitute for a man of genius.

Balthazar's greatness of character showed itself from the first in the most trivial details of life. Conjugal love was a magnificent thing in his eyes; he determined to develop all its beauty; and, like all powerful characters, he could not bear that there should be any falling short in attainment. His ingenuity continually varied the calm monotony of happiness, and everything that he did bore the stamp of a noble nature. For instance, although he was in sympathy with the philosophical movement of the eighteenth century, he installed a priest in his household until the year 1801 (a step which laid him open to the severe penalties of the Revolutionary code), humoring the bigoted Catholicism which his Spanish wife had imbibed with her mother's milk. After the Roman Catholic worship was restored in France, he went with her every Sunday to mass.

His attachment never quitted the forms of passion. He never asserted the protecting power that women love so well to feel, because to his wife it would have seemed like pity. On the contrary, by a most ingenious form of flattery, he treated her as his equal, and would break into playful rebellion against her authority, as a man will sometimes permit himself to set the power of a pretty woman at defiance. A smile of happiness always hovered upon his lips, and his tones were unvaryingly gentle.

He loved his Josephine for her sake and for his own with a warmth and intensity which is a constant tribute to the beauty and character of a wife. Fidelity, often the result of social, religious, or interested considerations, seemed in his

case to be involuntary, and was always accompanied by the sweet flatteries of the springtime of love. Duty was the sole obligation of marriage which was unknown to these two equally loving beings, for Balthazar Claes found in Josephine de Temninck a constant and complete realization of his hopes. His heart was always satisfied to the full; he was always happy, and never weary of his happiness. As might have been expected, the granddaughter of the house of Casa-Real, with her Spanish blood, possessed the secret of an "infinite variety," but she had no less capacity for a limitless devotion, and a woman's genius lies in devotion, as all her beauty consists in grace. Her love was a blind fanaticism; at a sign from him she would have gone joyfully to her death. Balthazar's delicacy had brought out all the womanly generosity of her nature, and she longed to give more than she received. This mutual exchange of a happiness which each in turn lavished upon the other visibly centered her life without her, and filled her words, her looks, and actions with a love that only grew stronger with time. On all sides gratitude enriched and varied the life of the heart, just as the certainty that each lived only for the other made littleness impossible, and the least accessories of such a life ceased to be trivialities.

But in the whole feminine creation are there any happier women than the deformed wife who is not crooked for the eyes she loves, the lame woman when her husband would not have her other than she is, and the wife grown old and gray who is still young for him? Human passion can go no further than this. When a woman is adored for what is usually regarded as a defect, is not this her greatest glory? It is easy to forget in a moment's fascination that a woman does not walk straight; but when she is loved because she is lame, it is the apotheosis of her infirmity. In the evangel of women these words should perhaps be written, "Blessed are the imperfect, for theirs is the kingdom of love." And of a truth beauty must be a misfortune for a woman, for the flower of

beauty that withers so soon counts for so much in the feeling that she inspires; is she not loved for her beauty as an heiress is wedded for her gold? But a woman without this perishable dower, after which the children of Adam seek so eagerly, knows the love that is love indeed, the inmost mystery of passion, the union of soul with soul. The day of disillusion can never come for her. Her charm is not recognized by the world, she owes it no allegiance, and is fair for one alone; and when she makes it her glory that her defects should be forgotten, she cannot but succeed in her aim.

Accordingly, the best-loved women in history have been by no means perfectly beautiful for ordinary eyes; Cleopatra, Joanna of Naples, Diana of Poitiers, Mlle. de la Vallière, Mme. de Pompadour, and nearly all women famous throughout the world for the love which they once inspired, have had their defects and shortcomings, while others of whom it is recorded that there was no flaw in their loveliness have over and over again seen love end in piteous tragedy. Do mankind live, after all, rather by sentiment than by pleasure? Perhaps there is a limit to the charm of mere physical beauty, while the beauty of the soul is infinite? Is not this the moral of the tale which forms a setting to the "Arabian Nights?" If Henry VIII. had found a hard-featured wife, she might have defied the axe and retained the wandering fancy of her royal master.

Mme. Claes was ill educated, a curious circumstance, but explainable enough in the daughter of a Spanish grandee. She could read and write, but until her parents took her from the convent where her girlhood was spent (that is to say, until she was twenty years old) she had read nothing but the works of religious ascetics. On her entrance into society, and for a little while after, she had been too eager for amusement to learn anything but the frivolous arts of the toilet; and later, she had been so deeply mortified by her ignorance that she never ventured to take any part in conversation, and was

set down in consequence as an unintelligent girl. But one result of her neglected and mystical education had been that her natural capacities for thought and feeling had been unspoiled. In society she was as plain and uninteresting as an heiress; but for her husband she grew beautiful and thoughtful.

Balthazar made some attempt, it is true, in the early years of their marriage to teach his wife, so that she might not feel at a disadvantage in this way, but doubtless he was too late, for Josephine had no memory save that of the heart. She never forgot a syllable that he let fall concerning themselves; every least detail of their happy life was fresh in her mind, while yesterday's lesson was forgotten. This invincible ignorance might have brought about serious discords between many a husband and wife; but Mme. Claes' love for her husband was almost a religion, and the intuition of passionate love and desire to preserve her happiness had made her quick-witted. She so contrived matters that she always appeared to understand, and her ignorance was very seldom too apparent. Not only so, but when two love each other so well that every day seems for them the first day of their love, such vital happiness has a marvelous power of transforming the whole conditions of life. Does it not become like childhood, careless of everything that is not love or joy and laughter?

While the life stirs in us, and its fires burn fiercely, we let it burn unthriftily, nor set ourselves to measure the means or the end. For the rest, Mme. Claes understood her position as a wife better than any daughter of Eve. Her character was a piquant combination of Spanish pride with the submissiveness of the Flamande which makes the domestic hearth so attractive. She was dignified; she could command respect by a glance which revealed a consciousness of her own value and her high descent, but before Claes she trembled. She had set her husband so on high, so near to God, that the thought of what he would say or think controlled her every

thought or action, and her love had come to have a tinge of awe which heightened it. She had made it a point of honor to maintain the old Flemish bourgeois traditions of the house; she had prided herself on the plenty and comfort of her housekeeping, on the classic cleanliness of every detail; everything must be of the best, every dish at dinner must be exquisitely cooked and served. She so ruled things in her household that all their outer life was in harmony with the life of the heart.

They had two boys and two girls. The oldest child, a girl named Marguerite, was born in 1796; the youngest, a three-year-old boy, they had called Jean Balthazar. Motherly love was almost as strong in Mme. Claes as her affection for her husband. Sometimes, especially in the last years of her life, there was a cruel struggle between love for her husband and love for her children, when two claims upon her heart so nearly equal had become in some sort antagonistic. This was the domestic drama hidden away in the sleepy old house, and in the scene with which the story opens her tears and the anguish on her face were caused by a fear that she had sacrificed her children to her husband.

In 1805 Mme. Claes' brother had died, leaving no children. His sister, according to Spanish law, could not inherit the estates, which passed with the title to the heir-at-law; but the Duke had left to her about sixty thousand ducats, and the representative of the younger branch of the house did not challenge the will. No thought of interest had ever mingled with their love; yet Josephine found a certain satisfaction in the thought that her fortune now equaled that of her husband, and was glad that in her turn she brought something to him from whom she had been generously content to receive everything. So it chanced that Balthazar's marriage, which prudent people had condemned, turned out to be a good match from a worldly point of view.

It was a sufficiently difficult problem to know what to do

with the money. The Maison Claes was so rich in treasures of art, in pictures and valuable furniture, that it was scarcely possible to find anything worthy of being added to such a collection, formed by the taste of their ancestors. The noble collection of pictures had been begun by one generation and completed by those that followed, a love of art having thus become a family tradition. There were fifty paintings in the state apartments on the first floor, and in the long gallery which connected those rooms with the quarter in which the family lived there were more than a hundred famous pictures by Rubens, Ruysdael, Van Dyck, Terburg, Gerard Dow, Teniers, Mieris, Paul Potter, Wouwerman, Rembrandt, Hobbema, Cranach, and Holbein. Three centuries of patient research had assembled them. Examples of the French and Italian schools were in the minority, but nevertheless they were all of them genuine and of capital importance.

Another generation had been amateurs of Oriental porcelain. Some Claes, long dead and gone, had been an enthusiastic collector of old furniture or of silver plate ; Balthazar's own father, the last survivor of the once famous Dutch society, had bequeathed to his son one of the finest known collections of tulips; there was not a Claes but had left some trace of his ruling passion, and every Fleming is a born collector. The old house was superbly furnished with heirlooms, which represented vast sums of money. Without, it was as smooth and bare as a sea-shell, and like a shell it was decked within with fair colors and radiant mother-of-pearl.

Balthazar Claes also possessed a country house in the plain of Orchies. So far from adopting the French plan and living up to his income, he never spent more than one-fourth of it, following old Batavian usages. This put him on the same footing as the wealthiest persons in Douai, for their yearly expenditure never exceeded twelve hundred ducats.

In the days when the Civil Code became the law of the land, the wisdom of this course was abundantly evident. By

virtue of the clause *des Successions*, which divides the estate in equal shares among the children, each child's share would have been small, and the treasures stored for so long in the house of Claes must have one day been dispersed. With his wife's concurrence Balthazar invested Mme. Claes' fortune in such a manner as to secure to each of their children a position similar to that in which they had been brought up, and the house of Claes was still kept up on the old footing. They bought woods which had suffered somewhat in the recent wars, but which in ten years' time, with due care, were likely to increase enormously in value.

The society in which M. Claes moved consisted of the oldest families of Douai. His wife's noble qualities and character were so thoroughly appreciated, that by a sort of tacit agreement the social regulations so stringently enforced in old-fashioned towns were somewhat relaxed in her case. During the winter months, which were always spent in Douai, she seldom left her house, and went very little into society—society came to her. She received every Wednesday, and gave three large dinner parties every month. It was generally recognized that Mme. Claes felt more at ease in her own house, and she herself was little inclined to leave it; her love for her husband and her children, whom she was bringing up very carefully, kept her at home.

Until the year 1809 there was no change in the ways of the household, thus privileged to form an exception to accepted social rules. The life of these two beings, with its hidden depths of love and joy, flowed on to all appearance like other lives. Balthazar Claes' passion for his wife, which she had known how to keep, seemed, as he himself said, to have determined his bent, and his innate perseverance was employed in the cultivation of happiness, as he had cultivated tulips in his youth; it absolved him from the necessity for a mania traditional in his family. But at the end of the year a change came over Balthazar; it came about so imperceptibly that at

first Mme. Claes did not think it necessary to ask the reason of these ominous signs. One evening he seemed preoccupied as he went to bed, and she conscientiously respected his mood. Her woman's tact and habits of submission had always led her to wait for Balthazar's confidence; she felt far too sure of his affection to give way to jealousy. Yet though she knew that any inquiry would meet with a prompt answer, the old impressions of early life had given her an instinctive dread of a rebuff. Her husband's moral malady went through many stages, and only by slow degrees did it assume an acute form, and grow so intolerably violent that at last the happiness of a whole household was destroyed. However engrossing Balthazar's thoughts might be, he was ready for many months to lay them aside to talk with her; and there was no alteration in his affection, his frequent silent moods were the only indications of the change that was being wrought in his character.

It was long before Mme. Claes gave up the hope that her husband would approach the subject himself and tell her about his mysterious preoccupations. Sometimes she thought that he was waiting until there should be some practical result of his labors; there is a kind of pride in so many men which leads them to fight their battles alone and to appear only as victors. In that day of triumph the light of happiness would shine all the more brightly for being withdrawn for a while, and Balthazar's love would fill up all the blank spaces in the page of life, blanks for which his heart was not to blame. Josephine knew her husband well enough to know that he would never forgive himself if he discovered that his Pepita's happiness had been overcast for so many months. So she kept silence, and felt it a kind of joy to suffer through him and for him; for in her passion there was a trace of the piety of the Spaniard, which can never distinguish between religion and love, and cannot understand a love without suffering. She waited for a return of affection, saying to herself every

evening, "It will surely come to-morrow!" as if love were an absent wanderer. During all these secret troubles she was expecting her youngest child. There had been a horrible revelation of a wretched future. Everything seemed to draw her husband from her, and even in his love he was preoccupied. Her woman's pride, wounded for the first time, sounded the depths of the mysterious gulf which separated her from the Claes of their early married life. From that time things grew worse and worse. Claes, who but lately had been immersed in family happiness, who played with his children for whole hours together at romping games on the carpet, in the parlor, or in the garden walks, who seemed as if he could only live beneath the dark eyes of his Pepita, did not notice his wife's condition, forgot to share in the family life, and seemed to forget his own existence.

The longer Mme. Claes delayed to ask the reason of his preoccupation, the more her courage failed her. Her blood seemed to boil at the thought, and her voice died in her throat. At last she felt convinced that her husband had ceased to care for her, and grew seriously alarmed. This dread grew upon her; she brooded over it till her hours were filled with unhappy musings and feverish excitement, and she began to despair. She justified Balthazar at her own expense, telling herself that she was old and ugly. Then it seemed to her that she saw a generous motive, humiliating though it might be to her pride, in his absorption in his work; it was a kind of negative faithfulness; she determined to give him back his independence by bringing about a secret divorce, that clue to the apparent happiness of not a few households. Yet before renouncing their old life, she made an effort to read her husband's heart—and found it shut.

She saw how Balthazar, by slow degrees, became indifferent to everything that had once been dear to him; he cared no longer for his tulips in flower; he seemed to have forgotten the very existence of his children. Clearly this passion was one

of those that lie without the pale of the heart's affections, but which no less, as women think, dry up the springs of affection. Love slept, but had not fled. This was some comfort, though the trouble itself remained as heretofore; and hope, the explanation of all situations like these, prolonged the crisis.

Sometimes, just as the poor wife's despair had grown to such a pitch that she had gathered courage to question her husband, there would be a brief interval of happiness, and Balthazar would make it clear to her that though he might be in the clutches of some diabolical thought, it was a thought which still permitted him to be himself again at times. In these brief moments, when her sky grew brighter, she was too eager to enjoy the gleam of happiness, too afraid to lose any of it by her importunity, to ask for an explanation; and just as she nerved herself to speak, he would escape her. While the words were on her lips, Balthazar would suddenly leave her, or he would fall into deep musings from which nothing could arouse him.

Before very long there set in a reaction of the mental on the physical existence. The havoc thus wrought was scarcely visible at first, save to the eyes of a loving woman, who watched for a clue to her husband's inmost thoughts in their slightest manifestations. She could often scarcely keep back the tears as she saw him fling himself down after dinner into an easy-chair by the fireside, and sit there with his eyes fixed on one of the dark panels, gloomy, abstracted, utterly heedless of the dead silence about him. She watched, too, with an aching heart the gradual changes for the worse in the face that love had made sublime for her; it seemed as if the life of the soul was day by day withdrawing itself and leaving an expressionless mask. At times his eyes grew glassy, as if the faculty of sight in them had been converted to a power of inner vision. After the children had gone to bed, after long silent hours full of painful and solitary brooding, poor Pepita

would venture to ask, "Do you feel ill, dear?" Sometimes Balthazar would not answer at all, or he came to himself with a start like a man suddenly awakened from sleep, and said, "No," in harsh, sepulchral tones, which fell heavily on his wife's quivering heart.

Josephine tried at first to keep this anomalous state of things in their household a secret from the outer world, but this proved to be impossible. Balthazar's behavior was known and discussed in every coterie, in every salon; and, as frequently happens in little towns, certain circles were better informed as to the Claes' affairs than Mme. Claes herself. Several of her friends broke through the silence prescribed by politeness, and showed so much solicitude on her account, that she hastened to explain her husband's singular conduct.

"M. Balthazar," she said, "was engaged on a great work. It took up all his time and energies; but if it succeeded, it would make him famous, and his native town would have reason to be proud of him."

Patriotic enthusiasm runs high in Douai; you would be hard put to it to find a town more eager for distinction; the prospect of glory was gratifying to local vanity; there was a reaction in people's minds, and M. Claes' proceedings were viewed more respectfully.

His wife's guesses were not so very far from the truth. Workmen had been employed for some time past in the garret above the state apartments, whither Balthazar went every morning. He spent more and more of his time up there now, until at last he was in the garret all day long, and his wife and the rest of the family fell in with the new ways by degrees.

But Mme. Claes had yet to learn, to her unspeakable anguish, that her husband was always buying scientific apparatus in Paris; that books, machines, and costly materials of all kinds were being sent to him; and that he was bent on discovering the philosopher's stone. All this she must hear through the officious kindness of friends who were surprised

to find her in ignorance of her husband's doings. It was a bitter humiliation. These friends proceeded to say that she ought to think of her children and of her own future, and that she would be doing very wrong if she did not use her influence with her husband to turn him from the paths of error into which he had strayed. Mme. Claes might summon a great lady's insolence to her aid, and silence this absurd talk; but a sudden terror seized her in spite of her confident tone, and she determined that she would no longer efface herself. She would choose her ground, and speak to her husband on an equal footing; and so, feeling less tremulous, she ventured to ask Balthazar for the cause of the change in him and the reason of his continual seclusion. The Fleming frowned as he answered her—

"My dear, you would not understand it in the least."

One day Josephine had begged hard to know this secret, playfully grumbling that she who shared his life might not share all his thoughts.

"If you want to know about it so much," Balthazar answered, seeing his wife on her knees, "I will tell you. I am studying chemistry," he said, stroking her black hair, "and I am the happiest man in the world."

Two years after the winter in which M. Claes began his experiments, the house was no longer the same. Perhaps the chemist's abstracted ways had given offence; perhaps his acquaintances felt themselves to be in the way; or it may have been that the anxieties of which Mme. Claes never spoke had altered her, and people found her less charming than heretofore. Whatever the cause might be, she only received visits from her most intimate friends, and Balthazar went nowhere. He shut himself up in his laboratory all day, and sometimes all night; his family never saw him except at dinner. After the second year the winter and summer were alike spent in Douai; his wife had no desire to leave Balthazar and go alone to their country house.

Balthazar would take long solitary walks, sometimes only returning on the following day. Those were long nights of sickening anxiety for his wife. In Douai, as in most fortified towns, the gates of the city were shut at a fixed hour; when search and inquiry within the walls had been made in vain, poor Mme. Claes had not even the support of expectation, half-hope, half-anguish, and must wait till morning as best she might. And in the morning Balthazar would return as if nothing had happened. He had simply forgotton, in his abstraction, the hour at which the gates were closed, and had no suspicion of the torture which he had inflicted on his family. The joy and relief were nearly as perilous for Mme. Claes as terror and suspense had been. She made no comment; she never spoke to him of his wanderings. Once she had begun to ask a question, and she had not forgotten the tone of amazement in which he answered—

"Why, cannot one take a walk?"

The passions cannot be deceived. Mme. Claes' own misgivings bore witness to the truth of the reports which she had at first so lightly contradicted. She had suffered so much from polite conventional sympathy in her youth that she had no wish to experience it a second time. She therefore immured herself more closely than ever in her home, her acquaintances dropped off, and her few remaining friends soon followed suit. This materially added to her discomfiture, and gave her additional annoyance and worriment.

Balthazar's slovenly attire was by no means the least of her troubles. There is always something degrading in neglect of this kind for a man who belongs to the upper classes; and she felt it all the more keenly, because she had been used to a Flemish refinement of cleanliness. With the help of Lemulquinier, her husband's valet, Josephine tried for a while to repair the havoc wrought by these pursuits; but the new garments with which, without Claes' knowledge, she replaced the torn, burnt, and stained clothing, were little better than rags

by the end of the day, and she gave up the attempt in despair.

After fifteen years of happiness, it seemed to the wife, who had never known a pang of jealousy, that she counted for nothing in the heart where she had reigned but lately, and the Spaniard in her nature awoke. Science was her rival. Science had won her husband's heart from her, and love renewed its strength in the fires of jealousy that consumed her heart. But what could she do? What resistance could she make against this slowly-growing tyrannous power that never relaxed its hold—this invisible rival who could not be slain? A woman's power is limited by nature; how can she engage in a struggle with an idea, with the infinite delights of thought and charms that are always renewed? What could she attempt in the face of the coquetries of ideas which take new forms and grow fairer amid difficulties, which beckon to the seeker, and lure him on so far from the world that he grows forgetful of all things else, and human love and human ties are as nothing to him?

A day came at last when, in spite of strict orders from Balthazar, his wife determined that at least in bodily presence she would be near him; she also would live in the garret where he had shut himself up, and meet her rival there on her own ground and at close quarters; she would be with her husband during the long hours which he lavished on the terrible mistress who had won his heart from her. She meant to steal into the mysterious workshop, and to earn the right of remaining there. But as she dreaded an explosion of wrath, and feared a witness of the scene, she waited for a day when her husband should be alone, before making her effort to share with Lemulquinier the right of entry into the laboratory. For some time she had watched the man's comings and goings, and almost hated him. Was it not intolerable that the servant should know all that she longed to learn, all that her husband hid from her, and that she did not dare to ask? It seemed to

her that Lemulquinier was more privileged, and stood higher in her husband's estimation than she, his own wife.

So she went to the garret, trembling, yet almost happy, and for the first time in her life was made to feel Balthazar's anger. Scarcely had she opened the door, when he rushed forward and seized her, and pushed her out on to the staircase so roughly that she narrowly escaped a headlong fall.

"God be praised! You are still alive!" cried Balthazar, as he helped her to rise.

The splinters of a shattered glass mask fell about Mme. Claes; she looked up and saw her husband's face, white, haggard, and terrified.

"Dear, I told you not to come here," he gasped, sinking down on a step as if all his strength had left him. "The saints have saved your life. I wonder how it chanced that my eyes were fixed on the door just then. We were all but killed!"

"I should have been very happy to die so," she said.

"My experiment is utterly ruined," Balthazar went on. "I could not forgive any one else for causing me such a grievous disappointment; it is too painful. In another moment I should perhaps have decomposed nitrogen!——There, go back to your own affairs," and Balthazar returned to his laboratory.

"I should perhaps have decomposed nitrogen!" the poor wife said to herself, as she went back to her own room; and once there, she burst into tears.

The phrase conveyed no meaning to her. Men, whose education gives them a certain readiness to deal with new ideas, do not know how painful it is to a woman to lack the power to understand the thoughts of the man she loves. These divine creatures are more indulgent than we are; they do not tell us when they fail to find response to the language of their souls; they shrink from making us feel the superiority of their sentiments, dissemble their pain joyfully, and are

silent about the pleasures that we do not enter into. But they are more ambitious in love than we are; they must do more than wed a man's heart, they must share his thoughts as well. Ignorance of her husband's scientific pursuits gave Mme. Claes a more intolerable heartache than a rival's beauty could have caused. The woman who loves the most is at least conscious of this advantage over her rival; but such neglect as this left her face to face with her utter helplessness; it was a humiliating indifference to all the affections that help us to live.

Josephine loved, but she did not know; and her want of knowledge separated her from her husband. But besides this and beyond this, there lay a last extremity of torture; he was often between life and death, it seemed; under the same roof, and yet far from her, he was risking his life without her knowledge, in dangers which she might not share. It was like hell—a prison for the soul from which there was no way of escape, where there was no hope left. Mme. Claes determined that at any rate she would learn in what the attractions of this science consisted, and privately set herself to read works on chemistry. Then the house became like a convent.

The "Maison Claes" had passed through all these successive changes, and by the time that this story commences was almost "dead to the world."

The crisis grew more complicated. Like all impassioned natures, Mme. Claes never thought of herself; and those who know love, know that where affection is concerned money is of small moment, and interest and affection are almost incompatible. Yet it was not without a cruel pang that Josephine learned that there was a mortgage of three hundred thousand francs on her husband's estates. There were documents which proved this beyond a doubt, and gave occasion for gossip and dismayed conjecture in the town. Mme. Claes, justly alarmed, felt compelled, proud though she was, to make inquiries of her husband's notary, to confide her anxieties to

him, or to enable him to guess them; and was forced to hear from the lips of the man of business the humiliating inquiry, "Then has not M. Claes as yet said anything to you about it?"

Luckily, Balthazar's notary was almost a relation. M. Claes' grandfather had married one of the Pierquins of Antwerp, of the same family as the Pierquins of Douai; and ever since the marriage the latter branch, though scarcely acquainted with the Claes, had looked upon them as cousins. M. Pierquin, a young man of six-and-twenty, had just succeeded to his father's position; he alone, in his quality of notary and kinsman, had the right of entry to the house. Mme. Balthazar Claes had lived for many months in such complete seclusion that she was obliged to go to him for information of a disaster which was already known to every one in Douai.

Pierquin told her that in all probability large sums were owing to the firm which supplied her husband with chemicals. This firm, after making inquiries, had executed all M. Claes' orders without hesitation, and let him have unlimited credit. Mme. Claes commissioned Pierquin to ask them for an account of the goods supplied to her husband. Two months later, MM. Protez and Chiffreville, manfacturing chemists, sent in a statement by which it appeared that a hundred thousand francs were owing to them.

Mme. Claes and Pierquin studied the document with amazement that increased with each fresh item. Among enigmatical entries, commercial expressions, and undecipherable scientific hieroglyphs, it gave them a shock to find mention of diamonds and precious metals, albeit in small quantities, and of mysterious substances, apparently so difficult to procure or to produce that they were enormously valuable. The vast number of different items, the cost of carriage and of packing valuable scientific instruments and delicately adjusted machinery for transit, the expense of all the apparatus, together with the

fact that many of the chemical compounds had been specially prepared by M. Claes' directions, accounted sufficiently for the startling amount of the total.

In the interests of his cousin, the notary made inquiries concerning MM. Protez and Chiffreville, and the accounts which he received of them convinced him that they had been perfectly honest in their dealings with M. Claes; indeed, they had been more than honest, they had gone out of their way to keep him informed of the discoveries of Parisian chemists in order to save him expense.

Mme. Claes entreated Pierquin to keep the singular nature of these transactions a secret. If they were known in the town, all Douai would say at once that her husband was mad. But Pierquin told her that this was impossible; that he had obtained all possible delay already; and that as the bills for such large amounts had been formally noted, the secret was not in his keeping. He laid bare the whole extent of the wound, telling his cousin that if she could not contrive to prevent her husband from squandering his money in this reckless way, the family estates would be mortgaged up to their value in less than six months. As to making any effort himself, he added that he, Pierquin, had spoken to his cousin on the subject, with due deference, more than once, and that it had been utterly useless. Balthazar had answered once for all that in all his researches his object was to make a fortune and a famous name for his family. So in addition to the anguish which had clutched at Josephine's heart for the past two years—a cumulative torture, in which every sad or happy memory of the past added to the pain of the present—she was to know a horrible unceasing dread of worse to follow, of an appalling future.

A woman's presentiments are often marvelously correct. How is it that women fear so far oftener than they hope in all matters relating to this present life. Why do they reserve all their faith for religious beliefs in a future world? How is it

that they are so quick to discern coming trouble or any turning-point in our career? Perhaps the very closeness of the tie that binds a woman to the man she loves makes her an admirable judge of his capacity and with the instinct of love she estimates his faculties and knows his tastes, his passions, his faults, and good qualities. She is always studying these forces of man's destiny, and with the intimate knowledge of the causes comes the fatal gift of foreseeing their effects under all conceivable conditions. Women derive their insight into the future from their clear-sightedness in such things as they see in the present, and the accuracy of their forecasts is due to the perfection of their nervous organization, which enables them to detect and interpret the slightest sign of thought or feeling. They feel the great storms that shake another soul, and every fibre in them vibrates in harmony. They feel or they see. And Mme. Claes, though estranged from her husband for two years, felt that the loss of their fortune was impending.

In Balthazar's passionate persistence she had seen the reflection of his fiery enthusiasm. If it were true that he was trying to discover the secret of making gold, he would certainly fling his last morsel of bread into the crucible with perfect indifference; but what was he seeking to discover?

So far she had loved husband and children without attempting to distinguish the claims of either upon her heart. Balthazar had loved the children as she did; the children had never come between them. Now, all at once she discovered that she was at times more a mother than a wife, as heretofore she had been a wife rather than a mother. Yet she felt that she was ready even yet to sacrifice herself, her fortune, and her children to the welfare of the man who had loved and chosen and adored her, the man for whom she was still the only woman in the world; and then came remorse that she should love her children so little, and despair at being placed between two hideous alternatives. Her heart suffered

as a wife, as a mother she suffered in her children, and as a Christian she suffered for it all. She said nothing of the terrible conflict in her soul. After all, her husband was the sole arbiter of their fate; he was the master who must shape their destinies; he was accountable to God and to none other. How could she reproach him with putting her fortune to such uses, after the disinterestedness which had been so amply proved during the first ten years of their married life? Was she a judge of his designs? And yet her conscience asserted what she knew to be in keeping with all laws written and unwritten, that parents possess their fortune not for themselves, but for their children, and have no right to alienate the worldly wealth which they hold in trust for them.

Rather than take it upon herself to solve these intricate problems, she had chosen to shut her eyes to them; like a man on the brink of a precipice, who will not look into the yawning depths into which he knows that he must sooner or later fall.

For the past six months her husband had allowed her nothing for housekeeping expenses. The magnificent diamonds which her brother had given to her on the day of her marriage had been secretly sold in Paris, and she had put the whole household on the most economical footing. She had dismissed the children's governess, and even little Jean's nurse. Formerly the luxury of a carriage had been quite unknown among the Flemish burghers, who lived so simply and held their heads so high. So there had been no provision in the Maison Claes itself for this modern innovation, and Balthazar had been obliged to have his stables and coach-house on the opposite side of the street. Since he had been absorbed in chemistry he had ceased to superintend that part of the ménage, essentially a man's province, and Mme. Claes put down the carriage. She was so much of a recluse that the expense was as useless as it was heavy; and this would have been reason sufficient to give for her retrenchments, but she did not

attempt to give color to them by any pretexts. Hitherto facts had given the lie to her words, and now silence became her best.

Such changes as these, moreover, were almost inexcusable in Holland, where any one who lives up to his income is looked on as a madman. Only as her oldest girl, Marguerite, was now nearly sixteen years old, Josephine would wish her to make a great match, it was thought, and to establish her in the world in a manner befitting the daughter of the house of Claes, connected as it was with the Molinas, the Van Ostrom-Temnincks, and the Casa-Reals. The money realized by the sale of the diamonds had been exhausted some few days before the opening scene of this story. On that very afternoon, as Mme. Claes had met Pierquin on her way to vespers with her children, he had turned and walked with them as far as the Church of Saint Pierre, talking confidentially the while.

"It would be a breach of the friendship which attaches me to your family," he said, "if I were to attempt to conceal from you, cousin, the risks you are running. I must implore you to set them before your husband. Who else has influence sufficient to arrest him on the brink of the precipice? Your estates are so heavily mortgaged that they will scarcely pay interest on the sums borrowed. At this moment you have no income whatever. If you once cut down the woods, your last hope of salvation will be gone. Cousin Balthazar owes thirty thousand francs to Protez and Chiffreville in Paris; how will you pay them? How are you going to live? And what will become of you if Claes keeps on buying acids and alkalis, and glassware, and voltaic batteries, and such like gimcracks? All your fortune has flown off in gas and smuts; you have nothing but the house and the furniture left. A couple of days ago there was some talk of mortgaging the house itself, and what do you think Claes said?—'The devil!' 'Tis the first sign of sense he has shown these three years."

Mme. Claes in her distress clutched Pierquin's arm. "Keep our secret!" she entreated, raising her eyes to heaven.

The words had fallen like a thunderbolt. She sat quietly on her chair among her children, so overcome that she could not pray. Her prayer book lay open on her knee, but she never turned a leaf; her painful thoughts were as all-absorbing as her husband's musings. The sounds of the organ fell on her ears, but Spanish pride and Flemish integrity sent louder echoes through her soul. The ruin of her children was complete! She could no longer hesitate between their claims and their father's honor. The immediate prospect of a collision with Claes appalled her; he was so great in her eyes, so much above her, that the bare idea of his anger was scarcely less fearful than the thought of the wrath of God. She could no longer be so devoutly submissive, a change had come over her life. For her children's sake she must thwart the wishes of the husband whom she idolized.

His thoughts soared among the far-off heights of science, but she must bring him down to the problems of every-day existence; must break in upon his dreams of a fair future, and confront him with the present in its most prosaic aspect, with practical details revolting to artists and great men. For his wife, Balthazar Claes was a giant intellect, a man whose greatness the world would one day recognize; he could only have forgotten her for the most splendid hopes; and then he was so able, so wise and far-seeing, she had heard him speak so well on so many subjects, that she felt no doubt that he spoke the truth when he said that his researches were to bring fame and a fortune to them all. His love for his wife and children was not only great, it was boundless; how could such love come to an end? Doubtless it was stronger and deeper than ever, it was only the form that was changed; and she who was so nobly disinterested, so generous and sensitive, must continually sound the word "money" in the great man's ears;

must make him see poverty in its ugliest shape, and the rattle of coin and cries of distress must break in on the sweet voices that sang of fame.

And suppose that Balthazar's affection for her should grow less? Ah! if she had had no children, how bravely and gladly she would have faced the change he had wrought in her destiny! Women who have been brought up amid wealthy surroundings soon feel the emptiness of the life that luxury may disguise, but cannot fill; it palls on them, but their hearts are not seared; and when once they have discovered for themselves the happiness that lies in a constant interchange of sincere feeling and thought, when they are certain of being loved, they do not shrink from a narrow monotonous existence, if only that existence is the one best suited to the being who loves them. All their own ideas and pleasures are subordinated to the lightest demands of that life without their own; and the future holds but one dread for them—the dread of separation.

At this moment Pepita felt that her children stood between her and her real life, as science had separated Balthazar Claes from her. When she returned from vespers she flung herself down in her low chair, dismissed the children with a caution to make no noise, and sent to ask her husband to come to speak with her; but in spite of the insistence of the old manservant Lemulquinier, Balthazar had not stirred from his laboratory. Mme. Claes had time to think over her position, and had fallen into deep musings, forgetful of the hour and the day. The thought that they owed thirty thousand francs which they could not pay roused painful memories; all the troubles of the past started up to meet the troubles of the present and the future. She was overwhelmed by the problem, the burden grew too heavy for her, and she gave way to tears.

When Balthazar came at last, he looked more abstracted, more formidable, more distraught than she had ever seen him;

and when he gave her no answer, she sat for a while like one fascinated by the vacant unseeing gaze; the remorseless thoughts that had wrung drops of sweat from his brow seemed to exert a spell over her also. With the first shock came the wish that she might die. But the scientific inquiry made in those absent tones roused her courage just as her heart began to fail her; she would grapple with this hideous and mysterious power which had robbed her of her lover, her children of their father, and the family of their wealth, had overclouded all their happiness, and jeopardized the fair name of the house of Claes. Yet she could not help trembling, shudder after shudder ran through her; was it not the most solemn moment of her life—a moment that held all her future —as it was the outcome of all her past?

And at this point, weak-minded people, timid souls, or those who, sensitive by nature, are prone to exaggerate little trials of life, men who, in spite of themselves, feel a nervous tremor when they stand before the arbiters of their fate, may readily imagine the thoughts that crowded up in her mind. Her brain reeled, and her heart grew heavy with pent-up emotion, as she saw her husband go slowly towards the garden door. Few women have not known the misery of such inward debates as hers, so that even those whose hearts have not throbbed violently over a confession of extravagance, or of debts to their dressmaker, will have some faint idea of how terribly the pulse beats when life is at stake. A pretty woman can fling herself at her husband's feet, the graceful attitudes of her sorrow can plead for her, but Mme. Claes was painfully conscious of her deformity, and this added to her fears. When she saw Balthazar about to leave her, her first impulse had been to spring to his side, but a cruel thought restrained her. How could she rise and stand before him? She would appear ridiculous in the eyes of a man who had lost the old illusions of love, and now would see her as she was. Rather than lose one tittle of her power, Josephine would have lost

fortune and children. She would avoid all possible evil influence at this crisis.

"Balthazar!"

He started at the sound of her voice and coughed. Then, without paying any attention to his wife, he turned in the direction of one of the small square spittoons which are placed at intervals along the wainscot in all Dutch and Flemish houses; the force of old habit and association was so strong in him that the man, who was hardly conscious of the existence of human beings, was always careful of the furniture. This curious trait was a source of intolerable pain to poor Josephine, who could not understand it; at this moment she lost command over herself, and her agony of mind drew from her a sharp cry of suffering, an exclamation in which all her wounded feelings found expression.

"Monsieur! I am speaking to you!"

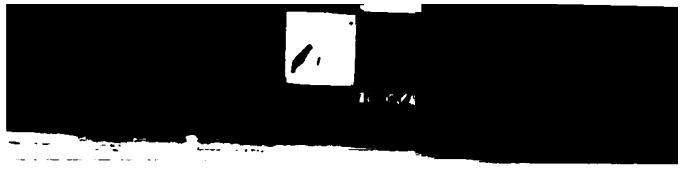
"What does that signify?" answered Balthazar, turning round abruptly, and giving his wife a quick glance. The hasty words fell like a thunderbolt.

"Forgive me, dear ——" she said, with a white face. She tried to rise to her feet, and held out her hand to him, but sank back again exhausted.

"This is killing me!" she said, in a voice broken by sobs.

The sight of tears brought a revulsion in Balthazar, as in most absent-minded people; it was as if a sudden light had been thrown for him on the mystery of this crisis. He took up Mme. Claes at once in his arms, opened a door which led into the little ante-chamber, and sprang up the staircase so hastily that his wife's dress caught on one of the carved dragon's heads of the balusters; there was a sharp sound, and a whole breadth was torn away. He kicked open the door of a little room into which their apartments opened, and found that the door of his wife's room was locked. He set Josephine gently down in an armchair, saying to himself, "Good heavens! where is the key?"

He took up Mme. Claes at once in his arms . . . and sprang up the staircase.



"Thank you, dear," said Mme. Claes, as she opened her eyes. "It is a long while since I have felt so near to your heart."

"Great heavens!" cried Claes. "Where is the key? There are the servants——"

Josephine signed to him to take the key which hung suspended from a riband at her side. Balthazar opened the door and hastily laid his wife on the sofa; then he went out to bid the startled servants remain downstairs, ordered them to serve dinner at once, and hurried back to his wife.

"What is it, dear heart?" he asked, seating himself beside her. He took her hand and kissed it.

"It is nothing," she said; "the pain is over now, only I wish that I had God's power, and could pour all the gold in the world at your feet."

"Why gold?" he asked, as he drew his wife to him, held her tightly in his arms, and kissed her again on the forehead. "Dearest love, do you not give me the greatest of all wealth, loving me as you do?"

"Oh! Balthazar, why should you not put an end to all this wretchedness, as your voice just now dispelled the trouble in my heart? You are not changed at all; I see that now," she replied.

"Wretchedness? What do you mean, dearest?"

"We are ruined, dear."

"Ruined?" he echoed. He began to smile, and fondly stroked the hand which lay in his. When he spoke again there was an unaccustomed tenderness in his voice.

"To-morrow, dearest, we may find ourselves possessed of inexhaustible wealth. Yesterday, while trying to discover far greater secrets, I think I found out how to crystallize carbon, the substance of the diamond.——Oh! dear wife, in a few day's time, you will forgive me for my wandering wits; for they are apt to wander at times, it seems. I spoke hastily just now, did I not? But you will make allowances for me,

the thought of you is always present with me, and my work is all for you, for us——"

"That is enough," she said; "we will say no more now, dear. This evening we will talk over it all. My trouble seemed more than I could bear, and now joy is almost too much for me."

She had not thought to see the old tender expression in his face, to hear such gentle tones again in his voice, to recover all that she thought she had lost.

"Certainly," he said. "Let us talk it over this evening. If I should grow absorbed in something else, remind me of my promise. I should like to forget my calculations this evening, and to surround myself with family happiness, with the pleasures of the heart, for I need them, Pepita, I am longing for them."

"And will you tell me what you are trying to discover, Balthazar?"

"Why, you would not understand it all if I did, poor little one."

"That is what you think? But for these four months past I have been reading about chemistry, dear, so that I could talk about it with you. I have read Fourcroy, Lavoisier, Chaptal, Nollet, Rouelle, Berthollet, Gay-Lussac, Spallanzani, Leuwenhoek, Galvani, Volta—all the books, in fact, about this science that you adore. Come, you can tell me your secrets now."

"Oh! you are an angel!" cried Balthazar, falling on his knees beside his wife, and shedding tears that made her tremble. "We shall understand each other in everything!"

"Ah!" she said. "I would fling myself into your furnace fire to hear such words from you, to see you as you are now."

She heard her daughter's footsteps in the next room, and sprang hastily to the door.

"What is it, Marguerite?" she asked of her eldest girl.

"M. Pierquin is here, mother dear. You forgot to give

out the table-linen this morning, and if he stays to dinner ——"

Mme. Claes drew a bunch of small keys from her pocket and gave them to her daughter, indicating as she did so the cupboards of foreign woods which lined the ante-chamber.

"Take it from the Graindorge linen," she said, "on the right-hand side."

"As this dear Balthazar of mine is to come back to me to-day, I should like to have him all complete," she said, going back to the room with mischievous sweetness in her eyes. "Now, dear, go to your room, and do me a favor—dress for dinner, as Pierquin is here. Just change those ragged clothes of yours. Only look at the stains! And is it muriatic or sulphuric acid which has burned those holes with the yellow edges? Go and freshen yourself up a little; as soon as I have changed my dress, I will send Mulquinier to you."

Balthazar tried to pass into his room by the door which opened into it, forgetting that it was locked on the other side. He was obliged to go out through the ante-chamber.

"Marguerite," called Mme. Claes, "leave the linen on the armchair there, and come and help me to dress; I would rather not have Martha."

Balthazar had laid his hand on Marguerite's shoulder, and turned her towards him, saying merrily—

"Good evening, little one! You are very charming to-day in that muslin frock and rose-colored sash."

He grasped Marguerite's hand in his, and kissed her forehead.

"Mamma!" crid the girl, as she went into her mother's room, "papa kissed me just now, and he looked so pleased and happy!"

"Your father is a very great man, dear child; he has been working for three years that his family may be rich and illustrious, and now he feels sure that he has reached the end of his ambitions. To-day should be a great day for us all."

"We shall not be alone in our joy, mamma dear; all the servants were sorry, too, to see him look so gloomy—— Oh! not that sash, it is so limp and faded."

"Very well, but we must be quick. I must go down and speak to Pierquin. Where is he?"

"In the parlor; he is playing with Jean."

"Where are Gabriel and Félicie?"

"I hear their voices out in the garden."

"Well, then, just run away downstairs and see after them, or they will pick the tulips; your father has not even seen the tulips all this year, perhaps he would like to go out and look at them after dinner. And tell Mulquinier to take everything your father wants up to his room."

When Marguerite had left her, Mme. Claes went to the window and looked out at her children playing below in the garden. They were absorbed in watching one of those gleaming insects with green, gold-bespangled wings that are popularly called "diamond beetles."

"Be good, my darlings," she said, throwing up the window sash to let the fresh air into the room. Then she tapped gently on the door that opened into her husband's apartment, to make sure that he was not lost once more in a waking dream. He opened it, and when she saw that he was dressing, she said merrily—

"You will not leave me to entertain Pierquin all by myself for long, will you? You will come down as soon as you can?" and she tripped away downstairs so lightly that a stranger hearing her footsteps would not have thought that she was lame. Half-way down the staircase she met Mulquinier.

"When monsieur carried madame upstairs," said the man, "her dress was torn by one of the balusters; not that the scrap of stuff matters at all, but the dragon's head is broken, and I do not know who is to mend it. It quite spoils the staircase; such a handsome piece of carving as it was too!"

"Pshaw! Mulquinier, do not have it mended; it is not a misfortune."

"Not a misfortune?" said Mulquinier to himself. "How is that? What has happened? Can the master have discovered the Absolute?"

"Good-day, M. Pierquin," said Mme. Claes, as she opened the parlor door.

The notary hastened to offer his arm to his cousin, but she never took any arm but her husband's, and thanked him by a smile, as she said, "Perhaps you have come for the thirty thousand francs?"

"Yes, madame. When I reached home I found a memorandum from MM. Protez and Chiffreville, who have drawn six bills, each for five thousand francs, on M. Claes."

"Very well," she answered; "say nothing to-day about it to Balthazar. Stay and dine with us; and if he should happen to ask why you have called, please invent some plausible excuse. Let me have the letter; I will tell him about this affair myself. It will be all right," she went on, seeing the notary's astonishment; "in a very few months my husband will probably pay back all the money which he has borrowed."

The last phrase was spoken in a low voice. The notary meanwhile watched Mlle. Claes, who was coming from the garden, followed by Gabriel and Félicie.

"I have never seen Mlle. Marguerite look so charming," he said.

Mme. Claes, sitting in her low chair, with little Jean on her knees, raised her face and looked from her daughter to the notary with seeming carelessness.

Pierquin was neither short nor tall, stout nor thin; he was good-looking in a commonplace way, with a discontented rather than a melancholy expression; it was not a thoughtful face in spite of its vague dreaminess. He had the name of being

a misanthrope, but he had an excellent appetite, and was too anxious to get on in the world to stand very far aloof from it. He had a trick of gazing into space, an attitude of indifference, a carefully-cultivated talent for silence, which seemed to indicate profound depths of character; but which, as a matter of fact, served to conceal the shallowness and insignificance of a notary whose whole mind was entirely absorbed by material interests. He was still sufficiently young to be emulous and ambitious; the prospect of marrying into the Claes family would have been quite enough to call forth all his zeal, even if he had had no ulterior motive in the shape of avarice, but he was not prepared to act a generous part until he knew his position exactly. When Claes seemed to be in a fair way to ruin himself, the notary grew stiff, curt, and uncompromising as an ordinary man of business; but as soon as he suspected that something after all might come of his cousin's work, he at once became affectionate, accommodating, almost officious; and yet he never sounded his own motives for these naïve changes of manner. Sometimes he looked on Marguerite as an infanta, a princess, to whose hand a poor notary dared not aspire; sometimes she was only a penniless girl, who might think herself lucky if Pierquin condescended to make her his wife. He was a thorough provincial and a Fleming; there was no harm in him; but his transparent selfishness neutralized his better qualities, as his personal appearance was spoiled by his absurd affectations.

As Mme. Claes looked at the notary she remembered the curt way in which he had spoken that day in the porch of St. Peter's Church, and noticed the change in his manner wrought by this evening's conversation. She read the thoughts in the depths of his heart, and gave a keen glance at her daughter, but evidently there was no thought of her cousin in the girl's mind. A few minutes were spent in discussing town talk, and then the master of the house came down from his room. His wife had heard him moving about in the room above with

indescribable pleasure, his step was so quick and light that she pictured Claes grown youthful again, and awaited his coming with such eagerness that in spite of herself a quiver of excitement thrilled her as he came down the staircase.

A moment later Balthazar entered, dressed in a costume of that day. His high boots, reaching almost to the knee, were carefully polished, the tops were turned down, leaving white silk stockings visible. He wore blue kerseymere breeches, fastened with gold buttons, a white-flowered waistcoat, and a blue dress-coat. He had shaved himself and combed and perfumed his hair, his nails had been pared, and his hands washed with so much care that any one who had seen him an hour before would hardly have recognized him again. Instead of an old man almost in his dotage, his wife and children and the notary beheld a man of forty, with an irresistible air of kindliness and courtesy. His face was thin and worn, but the hardness and sharpness of outline, which told a tale of weariness and strenuous labor, gave a certain air of refinement to his face.

"Good-day, Pierquin," said Balthazar Claes.

The chemist had become a father and husband again. He took up his youngest child and tossed him up and down.

"Just look at the youngster," he said to the notary. "Doesn't a pretty child like this make you wish you were married? Take my word for it, my dear boy, family pleasures make up for everything——

"Brr!" he cried, as Jean went up to the ceiling. "Down you come," and he set the child on the floor. Gleeful shrieks of laughter broke from the little one as he found himself so high in the air one moment and so low the next. The mother looked away lest any one might see how deeply she was moved by this game of play. It was such a little thing, yet it meant a revolution in her life.

"Now let us hear how you are getting on," said Balthazar, depositing his son upon the polished floor, and flinging him-

self into an easy-chair; but the little one ran to him at once; some glittering gold buttons peeped out above his father's high boots in a quite irresistible way.

"You are a darling!" said his father, taking him in his arms; "a Claes, every inch of you! You run straight.—— Well, Gabriel, and how is Père Morillon?" he said to his eldest son, as he pinched the boy's ear. "Do you manage to hold your own manfully against exercises and Latin translations? Do you keep a good grip on your mathematics?"

Balthazar rose and went over to Pierquin with the courteous friendliness which was natural to him. "Perhaps you have something to ask me, my dear fellow?" he said, as he took the notary's arm and drew him out into the garden, adding as they went, "Come and have a look at my tulips."

Mme. Claes looked after her husband, and could scarcely control her joy. He looked so young, so kindly, so much himself again. She too rose from her chair, put her arm round her daughter's waist, and kissed her.

"Dear Marguerite," she said; "darling child, I love you more than ever to-day."

"Papa has not been so nice for a long, long time."

Le Mulquinier came to announce that dinner was served. Mme. Claes took Balthazar's arm before Pierquin could offer his a second time, and the whole family went into the dining-room.

Overhead the beams and rafters had been left visible in the vaulted ceiling, but the woodwork was cleaned and carefully polished once a year, and the intervening spaces were adorned with paintings. Tall oak sideboards lined the room, the more curious specimens of the family china were arranged on the tiers of shelves, the purple leather which covered the walls was stamped with designs in gold, representing hunting scenes. Here and there above the sideboards a group of foreign shells, or the bright-colored feathers of rare tropical birds, glowed against the sombre background.

The chairs were the square-shaped kind with twisted legs and low backs, covered with fringed stuff, which once were found in every household all over France and Italy. In one of these Raphael seated his "Madonna of the Chair." They had not been changed since the beginning of the sixteenth century, and the framework was black with age, but the gold-headed nails shone as if they were new only yesterday, and the stuff, carefully renewed from time to time, was a rich deep red. The Flanders of the sixteenth century, with its Spanish innovations, seemed to have risen out of the past.

The wine flasks and decanters on the table preserved in their bulb-shaped outlines the grace and dignity of antique vases; the glasses were the same old-fashioned goblets with long slender stems that are seen in old Dutch pictures. The English earthenware was decorated with colored figures in high relief, Wedgwood's ware and Palissy's designs. The silver was massive, square-sided, and richly ornamented; it was in a very literal sense family plate, for no two pieces were alike, and the rise and progress of the fortunes of the house of Claes might have been traced from its beginnings in the varying styles of these heirlooms.

It will readily be imagined that a Claes would make it a point of honor to have table-linen of the most magnificent kind, and the table-napkins were fringed in the Spanish fashion. The splendors locked away in the state apartments only came to light to grace festival days; their glories were never dimmed, so to speak, by familiarity. This was the linen, plate, and earthenware in daily use, and everything in the quarter of the house where the family lived bore the stamp of a patriarchal quaintness. Add one more charming detail to complete the picture—a vine clambering about the windows set them in a framework of green leaves.

"You are faithful to old traditions, madame," said Pierquin, as he received a plateful of thymy soup, in which there were small rissolettes made of meat and fried bread, accord-

ing to the approved Dutch and Flemish recipe, "this is the kind of soup that always made part of the Sunday dinner in our father's time; it has been a standing dish in the Low Countries for ages, but I never meet with it now except here and in my uncle Des Raquet's house. Oh! stay a moment though, old M. Savaron de Savarus at Tournai still takes a pride in having it served, but old Flemish ways are rapidly disappearing. Furniture must be *à la grecque* nowadays; there are classical bucklers, lances, helmets, and fasces on every mortal thing. Everybody is rebuilding his house, selling his old furniture, melting down his plate, or getting rid of it for Sèvres porcelain, which is nothing like as beautiful as old Dresden or Oriental china. Oh! I myself am a Fleming to the backbone. It goes to my heart to see coppersmiths buying up beautiful old furniture at the price of firewood for the sake of the metal in the wrought-incrusted copperwork, or the pewter inlaid in it. Society has a mind to change its skin, I suppose, but the changes are more than skin deep; we are losing the faculty of producing along with the old works of art. There is not time to do anything conscientiously when every one lives in such a hurry. The last time I was in Paris I was taken to see the pictures exhibited in the Louvre, and, upon my honor, they are only fit for firescreens! Yards of canvas with no atmosphere, no depth of tone. Painters really seem to be afraid of their colors. And they intend, so they say, to upset our old school——Heaven help them!"

"Our old masters used to study their pigments," said Balthazar; "they used to test them singly and in combinations, submitting them to the action of sunlight and rain. Yes, you are right; nowadays the material resources of art receive less attention than formerly."

Mme. Claes was not listening to the conversation. The notary's remark that china had come into fashion had set her thoughts wandering, and a bright idea had at once occurred to her. She would sell the massive silver plate which her

brother had left her; perhaps in that way she might pay the thirty thousand francs.

Presently her husband's voice sounded through her musings. "Ana!" Balthazar was saying, "so they talk about my studies in Douai."

"Yes," answered Pierquin, "everybody is wondering what it is that you are spending so much money over. I heard the First President, yesterday, lamenting that a man of your ability should set out to find the philosopher's stone. I took it upon myself to reply that you were too learned not to know that it would be attempting the impossible, too good a Christian to imagine that you could prevail over God, and that a Claes was far too shrewd to give hard cash for powder of pimperlimpimp. Still, I must confess that I share in the regret that is generally felt over your withdrawal from society. You really might be said to be lost to the town. Indeed, madame, you would have been pleased if you knew how highly every one spoke of you and of M. Claes."

"It was very kind of you to put a stop to such absurd reports, which would make me ridiculous if no worse came of it," answered Balthazar. "Oh! so the good folk of Douai think that I am ruined! Very good, my dear Pierquin, on our wedding-day, in two months' time, I will give a fête on a splendid scale, which shall reinstate me in the esteem of our dear money-worshiping fellow-townsmen."

The color rushed into Mme. Claes' face; for the past two years the anniversary had been forgotten. This evening was an interval in Balthazar's life of enthusiasm which might be compared to one of those lucid moments in insanity when the powers of the mind shine with unwonted brilliancy for a little while; never had there been such point and pith and sparkle in his talk, his manner to his children had never been more playfully tender, he was a father once more, and no festival could have given his wife such joy as this. Once more his eyes sought hers with a constant expression of sympathy in

them; she felt a delicious consciousness that the same feeling and the same thought stirred in the depths of either heart.

Old Le Mulquinier seemed to have grown young again; seldom, indeed, had he been known to be in such spirits. The change in his master's manner had even more significance for him than for his mistress. Mme. Claes was dreaming of happiness, but visions of fortune filled the old serving man's brain, and his hopes were high. He had been wont to help with the mechanical part of the work, and perhaps some words let fall by his master when an experiment had failed, and the end seemed farther and farther off, had not been lost on the servant. Perhaps he had become infected with his master's enthusiasm, or an innate faculty of imitation had led Le Mulquinier to assimilate the ideas of those with whom he lived. He regarded his master with a half-superstitious awe and admiration in which there was a trace of selfishness. The laboratory was for him very much what a lottery-office is for many people—hope organized. Every night as he lay down he used to say to himself, "To-morrow, who knows but we may be rolling in gold?" And in the morning he awoke with a no less lively faith.

He was a thorough Fleming, as his name indicated. In past ages the common people were distinguished merely by nicknames; a man was called after the place he came from, after his trade, or after some moral quality or personal trait. But when one of the people was enfranchised, his nickname became his family name, and was transmitted to his burgher descendants. In Flanders, dealers in flax thread were called *mulquiniers;* and the old valet's ancestor, who passed from serfdom into the burgher class, had, doubtless, dealt in linen thread. That had been some generations ago, and now the grandson of the dealer in flax was reduced to the old condition of servitude, albeit, unlike his grandsire, he received wages. The history of Flanders, its flax trade, its industries, and its commerce, was in a manner epitomized in the old

servant, who was often called Mulquinier for the sake of euphony.

There was something quaint in his appearance and character. In person he was tall and thin; his broad, triangular countenance had been so badly scarred by the smallpox that the white shiny seams gave it a grotesque appearance; the little tawny eyes, which exactly matched the color of his sleek, sandy perruque, seemed to look askance at everything. He talked solemnly and mysteriously about the house; his whole bearing and manner excused the curiosity which he awakened. It was believed, moreover, that as an assistant in the laboratory he shared and kept his master's secrets, and he was in consequence invested with a sort of halo of romance. Dwellers in the Rue de Paris watched him as he came and went, with an interest not unmixed with awe; for when questioned he was wont to deliver himself of Delphic utterances, and to throw out vague hints of fabulous wealth. He was proud of being necessary to his master, and exercised, on the strength of it, a petty tyranny over his fellow-servants, taking advantage of his position to make himself master below stairs. Unlike Flemish servants, who become greatly attached to the family they serve, he cared for no one in the house but Balthazar; Mme. Claes might be in trouble, some piece of good fortune might befall the household, but it was all one to Le Mulquinier, who ate his bread and butter and drank his beer with an unmoved countenance.

After dinner, Mme. Claes suggested that they should take coffee in the garden beside the centre bed of tulips. The flowers had been carefully labeled and planted in pots, which were embedded in the earth and arranged pyramid fashion, with a unique specimen of parrot-tulip at the highest point. No other collector possessed a bulb of the *Tulipa Claesiana.* Balthazar's father had many times refused ten thousand florins for this marvel, which had all the seven colors; the edges of its slender petals gleamed like gold in the sun. The older

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which Marguerite handed him. "Drive nature out by the door and she comes in at the window," he went on, speaking to Mme. Claes in a low voice. "You will perhaps be so good as to speak to him yourself; the devil himself would not rouse him now from his cogitations. He will keep on like this till to-morrow morning, I suppose."

He said good-bye to Claes, who appeared not to hear a syllable, kissed little Jean in his mother's arms, made a profound bow to Mme. Claes, and went. As soon as the great door was shut upon the visitor, Balthazar threw his arm round his wife's waist, and dispelled all her uneasiness over his feigned reverie by whispering in her ear, "I knew exactly how to get rid of him!"

Mme. Claes raised her face to her husband without attempting to hide the happy tears which filled her eyes. Then she let little Jean slip to the ground, and laid her head on Balthazar's shoulder.

"Let us go back to the parlor," she said after a pause.

Balthazar was in the wildest spirits that evening; he invented innumerable games for the children, and joined in them himself so heartily that he did not notice that his wife left the room two or three times. At half-past nine o'clock, when Jean had been put to bed, and Marguerite had helped her sister Félicie to undress, she came down stairs into the parlor, and found her mother sitting in the low chair talking with her father, and saw that her hand lay in his. She turned to go without speaking, fearing to disturb her father and mother, but Mme. Claes saw her.

"Here, come here, Marguerite, dear child," she said, drawing the girl towards her, and kissing her affectionately, "Take your book with you to your room," she added, "and mind you go early to bed."

"Good-night, darling child," said Balthazar.

Marguerite gave her father a good-night kiss and vanished. Claes and his wife were alone for a while. They watched the

last twilight tints fade away in the garden, the leaves turned black, the outlines grew dim and shadowy in the summer dusk. When it was almost dark, Balthazar spoke in an unsteady voice. "Let us go upstairs," he said.

Long before the introduction of the English custom of regarding a wife's apartment as a sort of inner sanctuary, a Flamande's room had been impenetrable. This is due to no ostentation of virtue on the part of the good housewives; it springs from a habit of mind acquired in early childhood, a household superstition which looks on a bedroom as a delicious sanctuary, where there should be an atmosphere of gentle thoughts and feelings, where simplicity is combined with all the sweetest and most sacred associations of social life.

Any woman in Mme. Claes' position would have done her best to surround herself with dainty belongings; but Mme. Claes had brought a refined taste to the task, and a knowledge of the subtle influence which externals exert upon our moods. What would have been luxury for a pretty woman was for her a necessity. "It is in one's own power to be a pretty woman," so another Josephine had said; but there had been something artificial in the grace of the wife of the First Consul, who had never lost sight of her maxim for a moment; Mme. Claes had understood its import, and was always simple and natural.

Familiar as the sight of his wife's room was to Balthazar, he was usually so unmindful of the things about him that a thrill of pleasure went through him, as if he saw it now for the first time. The vivid colors of the tulips, carefully arranged in the tall, slender porcelain jars, seemed to be part of the pageant of a woman's triumph, the blaze of the lights proclaimed it as joyously as a flourish of trumpets. The candlelight falling on the gridelin silken stuffs brought their pale tints into harmony with the brilliant surroundings, breaking the surface with dim golden gleams wherever it caught the

light, shining on the petals of the flowers till they glowed like heaped-up gems. And these preparations had been made for him! It was all for him!

Josephine could have found no more eloquent way of telling him that he was the source of all her joys and sorrows. There was something deliciously soothing to the soul in this room, something that banished every thought of sadness, till nothing but the consciousness of perfect and serene happiness was left. The soft clinging perfume of the Oriental hangings filled the air without palling on the senses; the very curtains, so carefully drawn, revealed a jealous anxiety to treasure the lowest word uttered there, to shut out everything beyond from the eyes of him whom she had won back.

Mme. Claes drew the tapestry hangings across the door that no sound might reach them from without. Then, as she stood for a moment wrapped in a loose dressing-gown with deep frills of lace at the throat, her beautiful hair, black and glossy as a raven's wing, making a setting for her face, Josephine glanced with a bright smile at her husband, who was sitting by the hearth. A witty woman, who at times grows beautiful when her soul passes into her face, can express irresistible hopes in her smile.

A woman's greatest charm consists in a constant appeal to a man's generosity, in a graceful admission of helplessness, which stimulates his pride and awakens his noblest feelings. Is there not a magical power in such a confession of weakness? When the rings had slid noiselessly over the curtain-rod, she went towards her husband, laying her hand on a chair as though to find support, or to move more gracefully and dissemble her lameness. It was a mute request for help. Balthazar seemed lost in thought; his eyes rested on the pale olive face against its dusky background with a sense of perfect satisfaction; now he shook off his musings, sprang up, took his wife in his arms, and carried her to the sofa. This was exactly what she had intended.

"You promised," she said, taking his hands, which thrilled at her touch, "to let me into the secret of your researches. You must admit, dear, that I am worthy of the confidence, for I have been brave enough to study a science which the church condemns, so that I may understand all that you say. But you must not hide anything from me; I am curious. And, first of all, tell me how it chanced that one morning you looked so troubled when I had left you so happy the evening before?"

"You are dressed too coquettishly to talk about chemistry."

"No, dear, to learn a secret which will let me a little further into your heart; is not that the greatest of all joys for me? All the sweetness of life is comprised, and has its source, in a closer understanding between two souls. And now, when your love is wholly and solely mine, I want to know this tyrannous idea which drew you away from me for so long. Yes, I am more jealous of a thought than all the women in the world. Love is vast, but love is not infinite; and in science there are unfathomable depths; I cannot let you go forth into them alone. I hate everything that can come between us; some day the fame that you are seeking so eagerly will be yours, and I shall be miserable. Fame would give you intense pleasure, would it not? and I alone should be the source of your pleasures, monsieur."

"No, dear angel, it was not a thought that set me on this glorious quest; it was a man."

'A man!" she cried aghast.

"Do you remember the Polish officer, Pepita, who spent a night here in our house in 1809?"

"Do I remember him? I am vexed with myself because I see his face so often—his bald head, the curling ends of his mustache, his sharp worn features, and those eyes of his, like flickering fires lit in hell, shining out of the coal-black hollows under his brows! There was something appalling in his listless mechanical way of walking! If all the inns had

not been full, he certainly should never have spent the night here!"

"Well, that Polish gentleman was a M. Adam de Wierzchownia," answered Balthazar. "That evening, when you left us sitting in the parlor by ourselves, we fell somehow to talking about chemistry. He had been forced to relinquish his studies from poverty, and had become a soldier. If I remember rightly, it was over a glass of *eau sucrée* that we recognized each other as adepts. When I told Mulquinier to bring the sugar in lumps and not in powder, the captain gave a start of surprise.

"'Have you ever studied chemistry?" he asked.

"'Yes, with Lavoisier,' I told him.

"'You are very lucky,' he exclaimed; 'you are rich, you are your own master——'

"He gave one of those groans that reveal a hell of misery hidden and locked away in a man's heart or brain, a sigh of suppressed and helpless rage of which words cannot give any idea, and completed his sentence with a glance that made me shudder. After a pause he told me that, since what might be called the death of Poland, he had taken refuge in Sweden, and there had sought consolation in the study of chemistry, which had always had an irresistible attraction for him.

"'Well,' he added, 'I see that you have recognized, as I have, that if gum arabic, sugar, and starch are reduced to a fine powder, they are almost indistinguishable, and, if analyzed, yield the same ultimate result.'

"There was a second pause. He eyed me keenly for a while, then he spoke confidentially and in a low voice. To-day only the recollection of the general sense of those solemn words remains with me; but there was something so earnest in his tones, such fierce energy in his gestures, that every word seemed to vibrate through me, to be beaten into my brain with hammer-strokes. These, in brief, were his reasonings; for me they were like the coal which the seraphim laid

on the lips of the Prophet Isaiah, for after my studies with Lavoisier I could understand all that they meant.

"'The ultimate identity of these three substances, to all appearances so different,' he went on, 'suggested the idea that all natural productions might be reduced to a single element. The investigations of modern chemistry have proved that this law holds good to a large extent. Chemistry classifies all creation under two distinct headings—organic nature and inorganic nature. Organic nature comprises every animal or vegetable growth, every organic structure however elementary, or, to speak more accurately, everything which possesses more or less capacity of motion, which is the measure of its sentient powers. Organic nature is therefore the most important part of our world. Now, analysis has reduced all the products of organic nature to four elements, three of which are gases—nitrogen, oxygen, and hydrogen; and the fourth, carbon, is a non-metallic solid.

"'Inorganic nature, on the other hand—with so little diversity among its forms, with no power of movement or of sentience, destitute, perhaps, of the power of growth, conceded to it on insufficient grounds by Linnæus—inorganic nature numbers fifty-three simple bodies, and all its products are formed by their various combinations. Is it likely that the constituents should be most numerous when the results are so slightly various? My old master used to hold that there was a single element common to all these fifty-three bodies, and that some unknown force, no longer exerted, brought about the apparent modifications; this unknown force, in his opinion, the human intellect might discover and apply once more. Well, then, imagine that force discovered and once more set in motion, chemistry would be the science of a single element.

"'Organic and inorganic nature are probably alike based upon four elements; but if we should succeed in decomposing nitrogen, for instance, which we may look upon as a negation,

their number would be reduced to three. We are on the very verge of the Grand Ternary of the ancients—we, who are wont to scoff, in our ignorance, at the alchemists of the middle ages! Modern chemistry has gone no further than this. It is much, and yet it is very little. Much has been accomplished, for chemistry has learned to shrink before no difficulties; little, because what has been accomplished is as nothing compared with what remains to do. 'Tis a fair science, yet she owes much to chance.

"'There is the diamond, for instance, that crystallized drop of pure carbon, the very last substance, one would think, that man could create. The alchemists themselves, the chemists of the middle ages, who thought that gold could be resolved into its different elements, and made up again from them, would have shrunk in dismay from the attempt to make the diamond. Yet we have discovered its nature and the law of its crystallization.

"'As for me,' he added, 'I have gone farther yet! I have learned from an experiment I once made, that the mysterious Ternary, which has filled men's imaginations from time immemorial, will never be discovered by any analytical process, for analysis tends in no one special direction. But, in the first place, I will describe the experiment. You take seeds of cress (selecting a single one from among the many substances of organic nature), and sow them in flowers of sulphur, which is a simple inorganic body. Water the seeds with distilled water, to make certain that no unknown element mingles with the products of germination. Under these conditions the seeds will sprout and grow, drawing all their nourishment from elements ascertained by analysis. From time to time cut the cress and burn it, until you have collected a sufficient quantity of ash for your analysis; and what does it yield? Silica, alumina, calcic phosphate and carbonate, magnesic carbonate, potassic sulphate and carbonate, and ferric oxide; just as if the cress had sprung up in

the earth by the waterside. Yet none of these substances are present in the soil in which the cresses grew; sulphur is a simple body, the composition of distilled water is definitely known; none of them exist in the seeds themselves. We can only suppose that there is one element common to the cress and its environment; that the air, the distilled water, the flowers of sulphur, and the various substances detected by an analysis of the calcined cress (that is to say, the potassium, lime, magnesia, alumina, and so forth) are all various forms of one common element, which is free in the atmosphere, and that the sun has been the active agent.

"'There can be no cavil at this experiment,' he exclaimed, 'and thence I deduce the existence of the Absolute! One element common to all substances, modified by a unique force —that is stating the problem of the Absolute in its simplest form, a problem which the human intellect can solve, or so it seems to me.

"'You are confronted at the outset by the mysterious Ternary, before which humanity has knelt in every age—*primitive matter*, the *agency*, and the *result*. Throughout all human experience you find the awful number "three," in all religions, sciences, and laws. And there,' he said, 'war and poverty put an end to my researches!

"'You are a pupil of Lavoisier's; you are rich, and can spend your life as you will; I will share my guesses at truth with you, the results of the experiments which gave me glimpses of the end to which research should be directed. The *primitive element* must be an element common to oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, and carbon; the *agency* must be the common principle of positive and negative electricity. If after inventing and applying test upon test you can establish these two theories beyond a doubt, you will be in possession of the "first cause," the key to all the phenomena of nature.

"'Oh! monsieur, when you carry *there*,' he said, striking his forehead, 'the last word of creation, a foreshadowing of

the Absolute, can you call it living to be dragged hither and thither over the earth, to be one among blind masses of men who hurl themselves upon each other at a given signal without knowing why? My waking life is an inverted dream. My body comes and goes, does this and that, amid men and cannon, goes under fire, and marches across Europe at the bidding of a power which I despise; and I have no consciousness of it all. My inmost soul is rapt in the contemplation of one fixed idea, engrossed by one all-absorbing thought—the Quest of the Absolute; to detect the force that is seen at work when a few seeds, which cannot be told one from another, set under the same conditions, will spring up and blossom, and some flowers will be white and some will be yellow. You can see its mysterious operation in insects, by feeding silkworms, apparently alike in structure, on the same leaves, and some will spin a white, others a yellow cocoon; you can see it in man himself when his own children bear no resemblance to their father or mother. Hence, may we not logically infer that there is one cause underlying these effects, beneath all the phenomena of nature? Is it not in conformity with all our thoughts of God to imagine that He has brought everything to pass by the simplest means and in the simplest manner?

"'The followers of Pythagoras of old adored the one whence issued the many (their expression for the *primitive element*); men have reverenced the number "two," the first aggregation and type of all that follow; and in every age and creed the number "three" has represented God (that is to say, *matter*, *force*, and *result;* through all these confused gropings of the human mind there is a dim perception of the Absolute! Stahl and Becher, Paracelsus and Agrippa, all great seekers of occult causes, had for password *Trismegistus*—that is to say, the Grand Ternary. Ignorant people, who echo and re-echo the old condemnations of alchemy, that transcendental chemistry, have doubtless no suspicion that

our discoveries justify the impassioned researches of those forgotten great men!

"'Even when the secret of the Absolute is found, the problem of *movement* remains to be grappled with. Ah me! while shot and shell are my daily fare, while I am commanding men to fling away their lives for nothing, my old master is making discovery on discovery, soaring higher and faster towards the Absolute. And I? I shall die, like a dog, in the corner of a battery!'——

"As soon as the poor great man had grown somewhat calmer, he said in a brotherly fashion that touched me—

"'If I should think of any experiment worth making, I will leave it to you before I die.'

"My Pepita," said Balthazar, pressing his wife's hand, "tears of rage and despair coursed down his hollow cheeks as he spoke, and his words kindled a fire in me. Somewhat in this way Lavoisier had reasoned before, but Lavoisier had not the courage of his opinions——"

"Indeed!" cried Mme. Claes, interrupting, in spite of herself, "then it was this man who only spent one night under our roof that robbed us all of your affection; one phrase, one single word of his has ruined our children's happiness and our own? Oh! dear Balthazar, did he make the sign of the cross? Did you look at him closely? Only the Tempter could have those yellow eyes, blazing with the fire of Prometheus. Yes. Only the devil himself could have snatched you away from me; ever since that day you have been neither father nor husband nor head of the household——"

"What!" exclaimed Balthazar, springing to his feet, and looking searchingly at his wife, "do you blame your husband for rising above other men, that he may spread the divine purple of glory beneath your feet? a poor tribute compared with the treasures of your heart. Why, do you know what I have achieved in these three years? I have made giant strides, my Pepita!" he cried, in his enthusiasm.

It seemed to his wife at that moment that the glow of inspiration lighted up his face as love had never done, and her tears flowed as she listened.

"I have combined chlorine and nitrogen; I have decomposed several substances hitherto believed to be elements; I have discovered new metals. Nay," he said, as he looked at his weeping wife, "I have decomposed tears. Tears are composed of a little phosphate of lime, chloride of sodium, mucus and water."

He went on speaking without seeing that Josephine's face was drawn and distorted with pain; he had mounted the winged steed of science, and was far from the actual world.

"That analysis, dear, is one of the strongest proofs of the theory of the Absolute. All life, of course, implies combustion; the duration of life varies as the fire burns rapidly or slowly. The existence of the mineral is prolonged indefinitely, for in minerals combustion is potential, latent, or imperceptible. In the case of many plants this waste is so constantly repaired through the agency of moisture, that their life seems to be practically endless; there are living vegetable growths which have been in existence since the last cataclysm. But when, for some unknown end, nature makes a more delicate and perfect piece of mechanism, endowing it with sentience, instinct, or intelligence (which mark three successive stages of organic development), the combustion of vitality in such organisms varies directly with the amount performed.

"Man, representing the highest point of intelligence, is a piece of mechanism which possesses the faculty of thought, one-half of creative power. And combustion is accordingly more intense in man than in any other animal organism; its effects may be in a measure traced by the presence of phosphates, sulphates, and carbonates in the system, which are revealed by analysis. What are these substances but traces of the action of electric fluid, the life-giving principle? Should we not look to find the compounds produced by electricity in greater va-

riety in man than in any other animal? Was it not to be expected that man would possess greater facilities for absorbing large quantities of the absolute element, greater powers for assimilating it, an organization more perfectly adapted for converting it to his own uses, for drawing from it his physical force and his mental power? I am sure of it. Man is a matrass. In my opinion the idiot's brain contains less phosphorus, less of all the products of electro-magnetism, which are redundant in the madman; they are present in small quantities in the ordinary brain, and are found in their right proportion in the brain of the man of genius. The porter, the dancer, the universal lover, and the glutton misdirect the force stored up in their systems through the agency of electricity. Indeed, our sentiments——"

"That is enough, Balthazar! You terrify me; these are blasphemies. What! my love for you is——"

"Matter etherealized, and given off," answered Claes, "the secret doubtless of the Absolute. Only think of it! If I should be the first—I the first—if I find it out——if I find——if I find——!"

The words fell from him in three different tones of voice; his face gradually underwent a change; he looked like a man inspired.

"I will make metals, I will make diamonds; all that nature does I will do."

"Will you be any happier?" cried Josephine, in her despair. "Accursed science! Accursed fiend! You are forgetting, Claes, that this is the sin of pride by which Satan fell. You are encroaching on God!"

"Oh! Oh!"

"He denies God!" she cried, wringing her hands. "Claes, God wields a power which will never be yours."

At this slight on his beloved science Claes looked at his wife, and a quiver seemed to pass through him.

"What force?" he said.

"The one sole force—*movement.* That is what I have gathered from the books I have read for your sake. You can analyze flowers, or fruit, or Malaga wine, and of course discover their exact chemical composition, and find elements in them which apparently are not to be found in the surroundings, as with that cress you spoke of; possibly by dint of effort you could collect those elements together, but would you make flowers, or fruit, or Malaga wine from them? Could you reproduce the mysterious action of the sun? of the Spanish climate? Decomposition is one thing, creation is another."

"If I should discover the compelling force, I could create."

"Nothing will stop him!" cried Pepita, with despair in her voice. "Oh! my love, love is slain. I have lost love——"

She burst into sobs, and through her tears her eyes seemed more beautiful than ever for the sorrow, and pity, and love that shone in them.

"Yes," she said, sobbing, "you are dead to everything else. I see it all. Science is stronger in you than you yourself; you have soared too far and too high; you can never drop to earth again to be the companion of a poor woman. What happiness could I give you now? Ah! I tried to believe that God had made you to show forth His works and to sing His praises; that this irresistible and tyrannous power had been set in your heart by God's own hand. It was a melancholy consolation. But, no. God is good; He would have left a little room in your heart for the wife who idolizes you, and the children over whom you should watch. The devil only could enable you to walk alone among those bottomless pits; in darkness, lighted not by faith in heaven, but by a hideous belief in your own powers! Otherwise, you would have seen, dear, that you had run through nine hundred thousand francs in three years. Ah! do me justice, my God on earth! I do not murmur at anything you do. If we had only each other,

I would pour out both our fortunes at your feet; I would pray you to take it and fling it in your furnace, and laugh to see it vanish in curling smoke. Then, if we were poor, I should not be ashamed to beg, so that you might have coal for your furnace fire. Oh! more than that, I would joyfully fling myself into it, if that would help you to find your execrable Absolute, since it seems that all your happiness and hopes are bound up in that unsolved riddle. But there are our children, Claes; what will become of our children if you do not find out this hellish secret very soon? Do you know why Pierquin came this evening? It was to ask for thirty thousand francs, a debt which we cannot pay. Your estates are yours no longer. I told him that you had the thirty thousand francs, to spare the awkwardness of answering the question he was certain to ask; and it has occurred to me that we might raise the money by selling our old-fashioned silver."

She saw the tears about to gather in her husband's eyes, flung herself at his feet, and raised her clasped hands imploringly in despair.

"Dearest," she cried, "if you cannot give up your studies, leave them for a little until we can save money enough for you to resume them again. Oh! I do not condemn them! To please you, I would blow your furnace fires; but do not drag our children down to poverty and want. You cannot love them surely any more; science has eaten away your heart, but you owe it to them to leave their lives unclouded, you must not leave them to a life of wretchedness. I have not loved them enough. I have often wished that I had borne no children, that so our souls might be knit more closely together, that I might share your inner life! And now, to stifle the pangs of my remorse, I must plead my children's cause before my own."

Her hair had come unbound, and fell over her shoulders; all the thoughts that crowded up within her seemed to flash like arrows from her eyes. She triumphed over her rival.

Balthazar caught her in his arms, laid her on the sofa, and sat at her feet.

"And is it I who have caused your grief?" he said, speaking like a man awakened from a painful dream.

"Poor Claes, if you hurt us, it was in spite of yourself," she said, passing her hand through his hair. "Come, sit here beside me," she added, pointing to a place on the sofa. "There! I have forgotten all about it, now that we have you again. It is nothing, dear, we shall retrieve all our losses; but you will not wander so far from your wife again? Promise me that you will not. My great, handsome Claes. You must let me exercise over that noble heart of yours the woman's influence that artists and great men need to soothe them in failure and disappointment. You must let me cross you sometimes, for your own good. I will never abuse the power, and you may answer sharply and grumble at me. Yes, you shall be famous, but you must be happy too! Do not put chemistry first. Listen! we will not ask too much; we will let science share your heart with us, but you must deal fairly, and our half of your heart must be really ours! Now, tell me, is not my unselfishness sublime?"

She drew a smile from Balthazar. With a woman's wonderful tact, she had changed the solemn tone of their talk, and brought the burning question into the domains of jest, a woman's own domain. But even with the laughter on her lips, something seemed to clutch tightly at her heart, and her pulse scarcely throbbed as evenly and gently as usual; but when she saw revived in Balthazar's eyes the expression which used to thrill her with delight and exultation, and knew that none of her old power was lost, she smiled again at him as she said—

"Believe me, Balthazar, nature made us to feel; and though you will have it that we are nothing but an electrical mechanism, your gases and etherealized matter will never account for our power of foreseeing the future."

"Yes," he answered, "by means of affinities. The power of vision which makes the poet and the deductive power of the man of science are both based on visible affinities, though they are impalpable and imponderable, so that ordinary minds look on them as moral phenomena, but in reality they are purely physical. Every dreamer of dreams sees and draws deductions from what he sees. Unluckily, such affinities as these are too rare, and the indications are too slight to be submitted to analysis and observation."

"And this," she said, coming closer for a kiss, to put chemistry, which had returned so inopportunely at her question, to flight again, "is this to be an affinity?"

"No, a combination; two substances which have the same *sign* produce no chemical action."

"Hush! hush!" she said, "if you do not wish me to die of sorrow. Yes, dear, to see my rival always before me, even in the ecstasy of love, is more than I can bear."

"But, my dear heart, you are always in every thought of mine; my work is to make our name famous, you are the undercurrent of it all."

"Let us see; look into my eyes!"

Excitement had brought back all the beauty of youth to her face, and her husband saw nothing but her face above a mist of lace and muslin. "Yes, I did very wrong to neglect you for science. And, Pepita, when I fall to musing again, as I shall do, you must rouse me; I wish it."

Her eyes fell, and she let him take her hand, her greatest beauty, a hand that was at once strong and delicately shaped.

"But I am not satisfied yet," she said.

"You are so enchantingly lovely, that you can ask and have anything."

"I want to wreck your laboratory and bind this science of yours in chains," she said, fire flashing from her eyes.

"Well, then, the devil take chemistry!" earnestly exclaimed Balthazar.

"All my grief is blotted out at this moment," she said; "after this, inflict any pain on me."

Tears came to Balthazar's eyes at the words.

"You are right," he said; "I only saw you through a veil, as it were, and I no longer heard you, it had come to that ——"

"If I had been alone," she said, "I could have borne it in silence; I would not have raised my voice, my sovereign; but there were your sons to think of, Claes. Be sure of this, that if you had dissipated all your fortune, even for a glorious end, your great motives would have weighed for nothing with the world, your children would have suffered for what the world would call your extravagance. It should be sufficient, should it not, for your far-seeing mind, if your wife calls your attention to a danger which you had not noticed? Let us talk no more about it," she added, smiling at him, with a bright light dancing in her eyes. "Let us not be only half-happy this evening, Claes."

On the morrow of this crisis in the fortunes of the household, Balthazar Claes never went near his laboratory, and spent the day in his wife's society. Doubtless at Josephine's instance he had promised to relinquish his experiments. On the following day the family went to spend two months in the country, only returning to town to make preparations for the ball that had always been given in former years on the anniversary of their marriage.

Balthazar's affairs had become greatly involved, partly through debts, partly through neglect; every day brought fresh proof of this. His wife never added to his annoyance by reproaches; on the contrary, she did her utmost to meet and smooth over their embarrassments. There had been seven servants in their household on the occasion of their last "At Home," only three of them now remained—Le Mulquinier, Josette the cook, and an old waiting-maid, Martha by name, who had been with her mistress ever since Mme.

Claes had left the convent. With so limited a retinue it was impossible to receive the aristocracy of Douai; but Mme. Claes, who was equal to the emergency, suggested that a chef should be sent for from Paris, that their gardener's son should be pressed into their service, and that they should borrow Pierquin's man. Nothing betrayed the straits that they were in.

During the three weeks of preparation Mme. Claes kept her husband so cleverly employed that he did not miss his old occupations. She commissioned him to choose the flowers and exotic plants for the decoration of the staircase, the rooms, and the gallery; at another time she sent him to Dunkirk to procure some of the huge fish, without which a Netherland banquet would be shorn of all its glory. A fête given by the Claes was a very important function, demanding a prodigious amount of forethought and a heavy correspondence; for in the Low Countries, where family traditions of hospitality are sedulously maintained, for masters and servants alike, a successful dinner is a triumph scored at the expense of the guests.

Oysters arrived from Ostend, fruit was sent for from Paris, and grouse from Scotland, no detail was neglected, the Maison Claes was to entertain on the old lavish scale. Moreover, the ball at the Maison Claes was a well-known social event with which the winter season opened in Douai, and Douai at that time was the chief town of the department. For fifteen years, therefore, it had behooved Balthazar to distinguish himself on this occasion; and so well had he acquitted himself as a host, that the ball was talked of for twenty leagues round. The toilets, the invitations sent out, and any novelty that appeared even in the smallest details, were discussed all over the department.

This bustle of preparation left Claes little time for meditation on the Quest of the Absolute. His thoughts had been turned into other channels, old domestic instincts revived the dormant pride of the Fleming, the householder awoke, and

the man of science flung himself heart and soul into the task of astonishing the town. He determined that some new refinement of art should give this evening a character of its own; and of all the whims of extravagance he chose the fairest, the costliest, and most fleeting, filling his house with scented thickets of rare plants, and preparing bouquets for the ladies. Everything was in keeping with this unprecedented luxury; it seemed as if nothing that could ensure success were lacking.

But the 29th Bulletin, bearing the particulars of the rout of the Grand Army and of the terrible passage of the Beresina, reached Douai that afternoon. The news made a deep and gloomy impression on the Douaisians, and out of patriotism every one declined to dance.

Among the letters that reached Douai from Poland, there was one for Balthazar. It was from M. de Wierzchownia, who was at that moment in Dresden, dying of the wounds received in a recent engagement. Several ideas had occurred to him, he said, since they had spoken together of the Quest of the Absolute, and these ideas he desired to leave as a legacy to his host of three years ago. After reading the letter Claes fell into deep musings, which did honor to his patriotism; but his wife knew better, she saw that a second and deeper shadow had fallen over her festival. The glory of the Maison Claes seemed dimmed, as it were, by its approaching eclipse; there was a feeling of gloom in the atmosphere in spite of the magnificence, in spite of the display of all the treasures of bric-à-brac collected by six generations of amateurs, and now beheld for the last time by the admiring eyes of the Douaisians.

The queen of the evening was Marguerite, who made her first appearance in society. All eyes were turned on her, partly because of her fresh simplicity and the innocent frankness of her expression, partly because the young girl seemed almost like a part of the old house. With the soft rounded contour of her face, the chestnut hair parted in the middle, and smoothed down on either side of her brow, clear hazel

eyes, pretty rounded arms and plump yet slender form, she might have stepped out of the canvas of one of the old Flemish pictures on the wall. You could read indications of a firm will in the broad high forehead, gentle, shy, and sedate as she seemed; and though there was nothing sad or languid about her, there was but little girlish gleefulness in her face. Thoughtfulness there was, and thrift, and a sense of duty, all Flemish characteristics; and, on a second glance, there was a certain charm and softness of outline and a meek pride which atoned for a lack of animation, and gave promise of domestic happiness. By some freak of nature, which physiologists as yet cannot explain, she bore no likeness to either father or mother, but she was the living image of her maternal great-grandmother, a Conyncks of Bruges, whose portrait had been religiously preserved, and bore witness to the resemblance.

Supper gave some life to the ball. If the disasters that had befallen the Grand Army forbade the relaxation of dancing, no one apparently felt that the prohibition need apply to the pleasures of the table. Good patriots, however, left early, and only a few indifferent spirits remained, with some few card-players, and the intimate friends of the family. Little by little silence fell on the brilliantly-lighted house, to which all Douai had been wont to flock, and by one o'clock in the morning the gallery was empty, the candles were extinguished in one salon after another, and the courtyard itself, so lately full of noises and lights, had settled down into its wonted darkness and gloom. It was like a foreshadowing of the future.

As soon as the Claes returned to their rooms, Balthazar gave his wife the Polish officer's letter to read; she gave it back to him mournfully, she foresaw the end.

From that day forth the tedium of his life began visibly to weigh on Balthazar's spirits. In the morning, after breakfast, he used to play with little Jean for a while in the parlor, and talked with the two girls, who were busy with their sewing, or

embroidery, or lace-work; but he soon wearied of the play and of the talk, and everything seemed to be a set task. When his wife came down, having changed her wrapper for a morning dress, he was still sitting in the low chair, gazing blankly at Marguerite and Félicie; the rattle of their bobbins apparently did not disturb him. When the newspaper came, he read it deliberately through, like a retired tradesman at a loss how to kill time. Then he would rise to his feet, look at the sky for a while through the window panes, listlessly mend the fire, and sit down again in his chair, as if the tyrannous ideas within him had deprived him of all consciousness of his movements.

Mme. Claes keenly regretted her defective education and lack of memory. It was difficult for her to sustain an interesting conversation; perhaps it is always difficult for two persons who have said everything to each other to find anything new to talk of unless they look for it among indifferent topics. The life of the heart has its moments, and wants contrasts; the practical questions of daily life are soon disposed of by energetic minds accustomed to make prompt decisions, and social frivolity is unendurable to two souls who love. Such souls, thus isolated, who know each other thoroughly, should seek their enjoyments in the highest regions of thought, for it is impossible to set something little against something that is vast. Moreover, when a man has dwelt for long on great subjects, he is not easy to amuse, unless there is something of the child in his nature, the power of flinging himself into the present moment, the simple fresh-heartedness that makes men of great genius such charming children; but is not this youthfulness of heart rare indeed among those who have set themselves to see and know and understand all things?

During those months Mme. Claes tried all the expedients which love or necessity could suggest; she even learned to play backgammon, a game that had always presented insuperable difficulties to her mind; she tried to interest Balthazar

in the girls' education, consulting him about their studies, planning courses of lessons; but all these resources came to an end at last, and Josephine and Balthazar were in somewhat the same position as Mme. de Maintenon and Louis XIV. But Mme. de Maintenon could bring the pomps of power to her aid; she had wily courtiers who lent themselves to her comedies, playing their parts as ambassadors from Siam, and envoys from the Grand Sophi, to divert a weary king; and Louis XIV., after draining the wealth of France, had known what it was to be reduced to a younger brother's shifts for raising money; he had outlived youth and success, and had come to know old age and failure, and, in spite of his grandeur, to a piteous sense of his own helplessness; and she, the royal *bonne*, who had soothed his children, was not always able to soothe their father, who had squandered wealth and power and human lives, who had given his life for vanity and set God at nought, and was now paying the penalty of it all. But Claes was not suffering from exhaustion, but from unemployed energy.

One overwhelming thought possessed him. He was dreaming of the glories of science, of adding to the knowledge of the world, of fame that might have been his. He was suffering as a struggling artist suffers, like Samson bound to the pillars of the temple of the Philistines. So the result was much the same for the two sovereigns, though the intellectual monarch was suffering through his strength, and the other through his weakness.

What could Pepita do, unaided, for this kind of scientific nostalgia? At first she tried every means that family life afforded her, then she called society to the rescue, and gave two "cafés" every week. Cafés had recently superseded "teas" in Douai. At these social functions, the invited guests sipped the delicious wines and liquors with which the cellars always overflow in that favored land, drank their *café noir* or *café au lait frappé*, and partook of various Flemish

delicacies; while the women sang ballads, discussed each other's toilets, and retailed all the gossip of the town. It is just as it was in the time of Mieris or Terburg, always the same pictures, but some of the details are altered; the drooping scarlet feathers and gray high-crowned hats are wanting, and you miss the guitars and the picturesque costumes of the sixteenth century.

Balthazar made strenuous efforts to act his part as master of the house, but his constrained courtesy and forced animation left him in a state of languor, which showed but too plainly what inroads the malady had made, and these dissipations were powerless to alleviate the symptoms. Balthazar, on the brink of the precipice, might catch at branch after branch, but the fall, though delayed, was so much the heavier. He never spoke of his old occupations, he never uttered regrets, knowing that it was quite impossible to continue his work, but his voice and movements were languid, his vitality seemed to be at a low ebb. This depression could be seen even in the listless way in which he would take up the tongs, and build fantastic pyramids with the glowing coals.

It was a visible relief when the evening was over; sleep perhaps delivered him for a while from the importunities of thought; but with the morning came the thought that another day must be lived through, and he counted the hours of consciousness as an exhausted traveler might reckon out the leagues of desert that lie between him and his journey's end.

If Mme. Claes knew the causes of this weariness, she tried to shut her eyes to its effects; she would not see the havoc that it wrought. But though she might steel herself against the sight of his mental distress, his kindness of heart left her helpless. When Balthazar listened to Jean's laughter or the girls' chatter, and seemed all the while to hear an inner thought more plainly than his children's voices, Mme. Claes did not dare to ask him what that thought was; but when she saw him shake off his sadness, and try to seem cheerful, that

he might not cast a gloom over others, his generosity made her falter in her purpose. His romps with little Jean and playful talk with the two little girls brought a flood of tears to poor Josephine's eyes, and she had to hurry from the room to hide her feelings; her heroism was costing her dear, it was breaking her heart. There were times when Mme. Claes longed to say, "Kill me, and do as you like!"

Little by little the fire seemed to die out of Balthazar's eyes, and the dull bluish hues of age crept over them. Everything seemed to be done with an effort; there was a dull hopelessness in the tones of his voice and in his manner even towards his wife. Towards the end of April things had grown so much worse that Mme. Claes took alarm. She had blamed herself bitterly and incessantly for having exacted this promise, while she admired the Flemish faith and loyalty with which it was kept. One day when Balthazar looked more depressed than ever, she hesitated no longer; she would sacrifice everything if so he might live.

"I give you back your word, dear," she said.

Balthazar looked at her in amazement; for the moment he could hardly comprehend her meaning.

"You are thinking of your experiments, are you not?" she went on.

He answered with a terrible readiness, by a gesture, but Mme. Claes had no thought of reproach; she had had time to sound the depths of the abyss into which they were both about to plunge together. She took his hand in hers and pressed it as she smiled at him.

"Thank you, dearest," she said, "I am sure of my power; you have given up what was dearer than life for my sake. Now it is my turn to give up. I have sold a good many of my diamonds, but there are some left, and with those that my brother gave me we could raise money enough for you to continue your experiments. I thought I would keep the jewels for our two girls, but your fame will more than make up for

the sparkling stones, and, besides, you will give them finer diamonds some day."

The sudden flash of joy over her husband's face was like a death-knell to Josephine's last hopes, and she saw with anguish that his passion was stronger than himself. Claes had a belief which enabled him to walk without faltering in a path which in his wife's eyes led by the brink of a precipice. He had this faith to sustain him, but to her who had no faith fell the heavier share of the burden; does not a woman always suffer for two? At this moment she chose to believe in his success, seeking thus to excuse herself for her share in the certain wreck of their fortunes.

"The love of my whole life would never repay your devotion, Pepita," said Claes, deeply moved.

He had scarcely spoken the words before Marguerite and Félicie came into the room to wish their father and mother good-morning. Mme. Claes looked down; for a moment she felt almost guilty before the two children; she felt that she had sacrificed their future to a wild delusion; but her husband took them on his knees and talked and laughed with them, because the joy he felt craved expression. Thenceforth Mme. Claes shared in her husband's life of enthusiasm. Science itself and desire of fame was everything to Claes; she not only sympathized with his aims, but all her hopes of her children's future were now bound up in his pursuits. Yet when her director the Abbé de Solis had sold her diamonds for her in Paris, when packages began to arrive from the firm of manufacturing chemists, all the unhappy wife's peace of mind deserted her. It was as if the restless malevolent spirit that possessed her husband tormented her also, and she lived in constant and disquieting expectation. It was she who now sometimes sat like one dead all day long in her low chair, unable to act or to think from the very vehemence of her wishes. Balthazar was at work the while in his laboratory, but she had no outlet for her energies; the pent-up forces of

her nature harassed her soul as doubts and fears. Sometimes she blamed herself for weakly humoring a passion which she felt convinced was hopeless; she would remember M. de Solis's censure, and rise from her chair and walk to the window, and look up at the laboratory chimney with dismay and dread. If a curl of smoke went up from it, she would watch it rise in despair, and conflicting ideas strove within her until her brain reeled. Her children's future was vanishing in that smoke, but she was saving their father's life. Was it not her first duty to make him happy? This last thought would bring peace for a little space.

She had the freedom of the laboratory now, and might stay there as long as she pleased, but even this melancholy satisfaction had to be given up. It was too painful to see Balthazar so absorbed in his work that he did not even notice her presence; sometimes, too, she felt that she was actually in the way; the pangs of jealousy became intolerable, every little unintentional neglect was a deadly wound, a wild desire would seize her that the house might be blown up, and so put an end to it all. She made a barometer, therefore, of old Le Mulquinier. When she heard him whistle as he came and went, or laid the table for breakfast and dinner, she augured that her husband's experiments had turned out well; that there was some hope of success in the near future; but if Le Mulquinier was sad or sulky, she turned sad, wistful eyes on him: was Balthazar also depressed? A sort of tacit understanding was established between them at last, in spite of the proud reserve of the mistress and the surly independence of the manservant.

She had no resource in herself, no power of throwing off the thoughts that depressed her; she experienced to the full every crisis of hope or despair; the load of anxiety for the husband and the children that she loved weighed more and more heavily on the trembling wife and mother. She scarcely noticed how dreary the house was, or the silence and gloom that once had chilled her heart as she sat in the parlor all day

long; she had grown silent too, and forgot to smile. She brought up her two daughters to be good housewives; with a mother's sad foresight, she tried to teach them various branches of womanly skill against the day when they might come face to face with poverty. But beneath the monotonous surface of existence the pulses of life beat painfully. By the end of the summer Balthazar had not only spent all the money which the old Abbé de Solis had raised by selling the diamonds in Paris, but he was in debt—he owed some twenty thousand francs to Protez and Chiffreville.

In August, 1813, about a year after the day of the opening scene of this story, Claes was no nearer the end in view, though he had made several interesting discoveries, for which, unluckily, he cared not at all. The day which saw his programme completely carried out found him overwhelmed with a sense of failure. The thought of the vast sums of money which had been spent, and all to no purpose, drove him to despair. It was a wretched ending to his hopes. He left his garret, came slowly down into the parlor where the children were, sank into one of the low chairs, and sat there for a while like one dead, paying no heed to the questions with which his wife plied him. He escaped upstairs that he might have no witness to his grief. Josephine followed him, and brought him into her room; and there, alone with her, Balthazar gave way to his despair. In the man's tears, in the broken words that bore witness to the artist's discouragement, in the remorse of the father, there was something so wild and incoherent, so dreadful, so touching, that Mme. Claes, watching him, felt an anguish that she had never known before. The victim comforted the executioner.

When Balthazar said with horrible earnestness, "I am a scoundrel; I am risking our children's lives and yours; I ought to kill myself, it would be a good thing for you all," the words cut her to the heart. She knew her husband so well that she was in terror lest he should act at once on this

horrible suggestion; and one of those revulsions of feeling that stir life to its depths swept over her, a revulsion all the more dangerous because Pepita allowed no sign of agitation to appear, and tried to be calm and dispassionate.

"This time I have not consulted Pierquin, dear," she said; "he may be friendly, but he would not be above feeling a secret satisfaction if we were ruined, so I have taken the advice of an old man who has a father's kindness for us. My confessor, the Abbé de Solis, suggested a way of averting ruin at any rate. He came to see your pictures; and he thinks that if we sell those in the gallery we could pay off all the mortgages as well as your debts to Protez and Chiffreville, for I expect there is something owing to them."

Claes bent his head as a sign of assent; already his hair had grown white.

"M. de Solis knows the Happes and the Dunckers of Amsterdam," she went on; "they have a mania for buying pictures, their money was only made yesterday; and as they know that such works of art are only to be found in old family collections, they will only be too glad to give their full value for the paintings. Even when our estates are clear, there will still be something left over, for the pictures will bring in at least a hundred thousand ducats, and then you can go on with your work. We need very little, the two girls and I; we will be very careful; and in time we will save money enough to fill the empty frames again with other pictures, and in the meantime you shall be happy."

Balthazar raised his face to his wife's; he felt half-doubtful, half-relieved. They had exchanged rôles. The wife had become the protecting power; and he, in spite of the sympathy of hearts between them, held Josephine in his arms, and did not feel that she was convulsed with anguish, did not see how the tresses of her hair were shaken by the throbbing of her heart, nor notice the nervous quivering of her lips.

"I have not dared to tell you," he cried, "that I am

scarcely separated from the Absolute by a hair's-breadth. I have only to discover a means of submitting metals to intense heat in a vessel where the pressure of the atmosphere is nil—in short, in a perfect vacuum—and I shall volatilize them."

Mme. Claes almost broke down, the egoistic answer was too much for her. She had expected passionate gratitude for her devotion, and she received—a problem in chemistry. She left her husband abruptly, went downstairs into the parlor, sank into her low chair again, and burst into tears. Her two daughters, Marguerite and Félicie, each took one of her hands in theirs, and knelt on either side of her, wondering at her grief.

"What is it mother?" they asked her again and again.

"Poor children! I am dying; I feel that I have not long to live."

Marguerite shuddered as she looked at her mother's face, and for the first time noticed a ghastly pallor beneath the dark olive hue of the skin.

"Martha! Martha!" called Félicie. "Come here, mamma wants you."

The old waiting-woman came running from the kitchen. When she saw the livid color that had replaced the dusky brown-red tints in her mistress' face—

"Body of Christ!" she cried in Spanish, "madame is dying!"

She hurried away to bid Josette heat some water for a foot-bath for her mistress, and then returned.

"Don't frighten the master, Martha; say nothing about it," said Mme. Claes. "Poor dear girls!" she added convulsively, clasping Marguerite and Félicie to her heart. "If I could only live long enough to see you both happy and married. Martha," she went on, "tell Le Mulquinier to go to M. de Solis and ask him to come to see me."

The thunderbolt that struck down the mistress of the house naturally brought dismay in the kitchen. Josette and Martha,

old and devoted servants, were so deeply attached to Mme. Claes and her two daughters that the blow was as heavy as it was unexpected. The terrible words: "Madame is dying, monsieur must have killed her! Be quick and get ready a mustard bath!" had drawn sundry ejaculations from Josette, who hurled them at Le Mulquinier. Le Mulquinier, calm and phlegmatic as ever, was eating his breakfast at a corner of the table, underneath one of the windows which looked out on the yard. The whole kitchen was as spick and span as the daintiest boudoir.

"I knew how it would end," remarked Josette, looking straight at the valet as she spoke. She had climbed on to a stool to reach down a copper kettle which shone like burnished gold. "What mother could look on and see her children's father amusing himself by frittering away a fortune, like the master does, and everything flying away in smoke."

Josette's countenance, framed in its frilled cap, was not unlike the round wooden nut-crackers that Germans carve; she gave Le Mulquinier a sharp glance out of her little bloodshot eyes, which was almost venomous. For all answer the old valet gave a shrug worthy of a sorely-tried Mirabeau, and opened his cavernous mouth, but only to put a piece of bread and butter, accompanied by a morsel of red herring, into it.

"If madame would let monsieur have some money," he said at length, "instead of bothering him, we should all be swimming in gold very soon! There is not the thickness of a farthing between us and the——"

"Well, then, you, with your twenty thousand francs of savings, why don't you hand them over to the master? He is your master, and since you put such faith in his sayings and doings——"

"You know nothing about them, Josette. Just mind your pots and pans, and boil the water," said the Fleming, interrupting the cook.

"I know what I know; I know that we once had several

thousand ounces of silver plate here, and you have melted it down, you and your master between you; and we shall very soon have only six halfpennies left out of five pence," sharply retorted Josette.

"And the master," put in Martha, "will kill madame, and get rid of a wife who holds him back, and will not let him eat everything up. He is possessed, that is quite plain. You are risking your soul at the least, Le Mulquinier, if you have one, that is, for you are just like a block of ice, when all the rest of us are in such trouble. The young ladies are crying like Magdalens. Be quick and go for M. de Solis!"

"I have the master's orders to set the laboratory straight," said the valet. "It is too far from here to the Quartier d'Esquerchin. Go yourself."

"Just listen to the brute!" said Martha. "Who is to give madame her foot-bath? Is she to be left to die, with the blood gone to her head?"

"Mulquinier!" said Marguerite from the dining-room, which was next to the kitchen, "when you have left the message for M. de Solis, go and ask Dr. Pierquin to come at once."

"Hein! you will have to go!" said Josette.

"Mademoiselle, monsieur told me to clear out the laboratory," answered Le Mulquinier, turning triumphantly to the two women-servants.

M. Claes came down the stairs at this moment, and Marguerite spoke to him. "Father, can you spare us Mulquinier to go on an errand into the town?"

"There, you miserable old heathen, you will have to go now!" said Martha, as she heard M. Claes answer in the affirmative.

The lack of good-will and devotion to the family on the valet's part was a sore point; the two women and Le Mulquinier were always bickering, and his indifference increased their loyal affection. This apparently paltry quarrel was to bring

about great results in future days when the family stood in need of help in misfortune.

Once more Balthazar became so absorbed that he did not notice how ill his wife was. He gave little Jean a ride on his knee, but his thoughts were all the while with the problem which he might hope once more to solve. He saw the water brought for his wife's foot-bath, for she had not strength to leave the parlor, or the low chair into which she had sunk. He watched the two girls as they busied themselves about their mother, and did not try to account for their anxiety and care of her. Mme. Claes laid her fingers on her lips if Marguerite or Jean seemed about to speak. A scene of this nature was certain to make a young girl think; and Marguerite, standing between her father and mother, was old enough and sensible enough to understand what it meant. She realized that her father was most directly concerned in her mother's troubles.

A time always comes in the history of every family when the children begin consciously or unconsciously to judge their parents. Mme. Claes felt that this critical time had come; that the girl of sixteen, with her strong sense of justice, would see what would appear to her to be her father's faults very plainly, and Mme. Claes set herself to justify his conduct. The profound respect which she showed for him at this moment, the way in which she effaced herself for fear of disturbing his meditations, left a deep impression on her children's minds; they looked on their father with something like awe. But in spite of the infectious nature of this devotion, Marguerite could not help recognizing it, and her admiration increased for the mother to whom she was bound so closely by every incident of daily life. The young girl's affection had deepened ever since she had dimly divined her mother's troubles and had pondered over them; no human power could have kept the knowledge of them from Marguerite; a word heedlessly let fall by Josette or Martha had enlightened her as to their cause. In spite of Mme. Claes' reserve, her

daughter had unraveled thread by thread the mystery of this household tragedy.

In time to come Marguerite would be her mother's active helper and confidante, and, perhaps, in the end a formidable judge. Mme. Claes watched Marguerite anxiously, and tried to fill her heart with her own devotion; she saw the young girl's firmness and sound judgment, and shuddered to think of possible strife between father and daughter when she should be no more, and Marguerite had taken her place. Poor woman! she dreaded the consequences of her death far more than death itself. The resolution she had just taken had been prompted by forethought for Balthazar. By freeing her husband's estate from all liabilities, she left it independent, and forestalled all future disputes by separating his interests from those of her children; she hoped to see him happy until her eyes were closed, and when that day came, Marguerite would be the guardian angel who watched over the family. She hoped to leave her tenderness in Marguerite's heart, and so, from beyond the grave, her love should still shine upon those so dear to her. Yet she shrank from lowering Claes in Marguerite's eyes, and would not impart her misgivings and fears until the inevitable moment came; she watched Marguerite more closely than ever, wondering whether of her own accord the young girl would be a mother to her brothers and sister, and a gentle and tender helpmeet to her father.

So Mme. Claes' last days were embittered by fears and sad forebodings of which she could speak to no one. She felt that her deathblow had been dealt her in that last fatal scene, and her thoughts turned to the future; while Balthazar, now totally unfitted for the cares of property and the interests of domestic life, thought of nothing but the Absolute. The deep silence in the parlor was only broken by the monotonous beating of Balthazar's foot; he did not notice that little Jean had wearied of his ride, and climbed down from his father's knee. Marguerite, sitting beside her mother, looked at her

white, sorrowful face, and then glanced from time to time at her father, and wondered why he showed no feeling. Presently the street door shut to with a clang that echoed through the house, and the family saw the old Abbé de Solis slowly crossing the court leaning on his nephew's arm.

"Oh! here is M. Emmanuel," cried Félicie.

"Good boy!" murmured Mme. Claes, as she saw Emmanuel de Solis; "I am glad to see him again."

Marguerite's face flushed at her mother's praise. Only two days ago the sight of the Abbé's nephew had stirred mysterious feelings in her heart and awakened thoughts that had hitherto lain dormant. Only two days ago her mother's confessor had come to see the pictures in the gallery, and one of those small events that pass unheeded, and alter the whole course of a life, had then taken place; for this reason a brief sketch of the two visitors must be given here.

Mme. Claes made it a rule of conduct to perform the duties of her religion in private. Her director, who now entered the house for the second time, was scarcely known by sight to its inmates; but it was impossible to see the uncle and nephew together without feeling touched and reverent, and their visit had left the same impression on every one.

The Abbé de Solis was an old man of eighty, with silver hair; all the ebbing life in the feeble, wasted face seemed to linger in the eyes. He walked with difficulty, for one of his shrunken legs terminated in a painfully deformed foot encased in a velvet wrapping, so that he always needed the support of a crutch or of his nephew's arm. Yet when you saw the bent figure and emaciated frame, you felt that an iron will sustained that fragile and suffering body, and that a pure and religious soul dwelt within it. The Spanish priest, distinguished for his vast learning, his knowledge of the world, and his sincere piety, had been successively a Dominican friar, cardinal-penitentiary of Toledo, and vicar-general of the archbishopric of Mechlin. The influence of the house of Casa-Real would

have made him one of the highest dignitaries of the church; but even if the French Revolution had not put an end to his ecclesiastical career, grief for the death of the young Duke, whose governor he had been, had led him to retire from active life, and to devote himself entirely to the education of a nephew, who had been left an orphan at a very early age.

After the French conquest of the Netherlands he had settled in Douai to be near Mme. Claes. In his youth he had felt an enthusiastic reverence for Saint Theresa, and had always decided leanings towards the more mystical side of Christianity. There have always been Illuminists and Quietists in Flanders; Mlle. Bourignon made most of her converts among the Flemings; and the old Abbé de Solis found a little flock of Catholics in Douai, who still clung, undeterred by papal censure, to the doctrines of Fénelon and Mme. Guyon, and was the more glad to stay among them because they looked on him as a father in the faith. His morals were austere, his life had been exemplary; it was said that he had the gift of trance, and had seen visions. But the stern ascetic was not utterly divorced from the things of this life; his affection for his nephew was a link that bound him to the world, and he was thrifty for Emmanuel's sake. He laid his flock under contribution for a work of charity before having recourse to his own purse; and he was so widely known and respected for his disinterestedness, his perspicacity was so seldom at fault, that every one was ready to answer his appeals. To give some idea of the contrast between uncle and nephew, the older man might be compared to a hollow willow by the waterside, and the younger to a briar-rose climbing about the old lichen-covered tree, and covering it with graceful garlands, which seem to support it.

Emmanuel had been rigidly brought up. His uncle hardly allowed him to go out of his sight; no damsel was ever more jealously guarded by her mother; and Emmanuel was almost morbidly conscientious and innocently romantic. Souls that

draw all their force from religion retain the bloom of youth that is rubbed off so soon, and the old priest had checked the development of pleasure-loving instincts in his pupil; constant study and an almost monastic discipline had been his preparation for the battle of life. Such a bringing up, which launched Emmanuel into the world with all his youthful freshness of heart, might make his happiness if his affections were rightly placed at the outset, and had endowed him with an angelic purity which invested him with something of the charm of a young girl. The gentle eyes veiled a brave and fearless soul; there was a light in them that thrilled other souls, as the sound given out by crystal vibrates on the ear. His face was eloquent, yet his features were regular; no one could fail to be struck by their flawless delicacy of outline, and by the expression of repose which comes from inward peace. His fair complexion seemed still more brilliant by force of contrast with his dark eyes and hair. Everything about him was in harmony; his voice did not disappoint the expectations raised by so beautiful a face, and his almost feminine grace of movement and clear, soft gaze were in keeping with his voice. He did not seem to be aware that his half-melancholy reserve, his self-repression, his respectful and tender solicitude for his uncle, excited interest in him; but no one who had seen the two together—the younger man carefully adapting himself to the old Abbé's tottering gait, heedfully looking ahead for the smoothest path, and avoiding any obstacle over which the elder might stumble, could fail to recognize in Emmanuel those generous qualities of heart and brain that make man so noble a creature.

Emmanuel's real greatness showed itself in his love for his uncle, who could do no wrong in his eyes, to whom he rendered an unquestioning obedience; some prophetic instinct, surely, had suggested the gracious name given to him at the font. If in private or abroad the old Abbé exerted the stern and arbitrary authority of a Dominican father, Em-

She turned, with a swan-like movement of her throat, to glance once more at Emmanuel.

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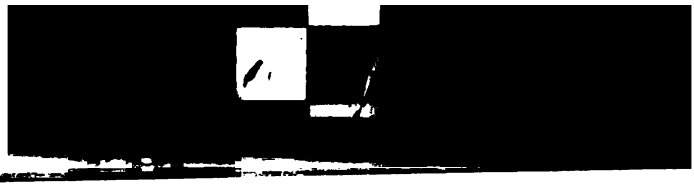


manuel would sometimes raise his head in such noble protest—with a gesture which seemed to say if another man had ventured to oppose him, he would have shown his spirit—that gentle natures were touched by it, as painters are moved by the sight of a great work of art; for a beautiful thought has the same power to stir our souls, whether it is revealed in a living human form, or made real for us by the power of art.

Emmanuel had come with his uncle to see the pictures in the Maison Claes; and Marguerite, having learned from Martha that the Abbé de Solis was in the picture gallery, found some slight pretext for speaking to her mother, so that she might see the great man of whom she had heard so much. She had gone thither unthinkingly, hiding her little stratagem under the careless manner by which young girls so effectually conceal their real thoughts, and by the side of the old man dressed in black, with his deathly pallor and bent and stooping frame, she had seen Emmanuel's young and beautiful face. The two young creatures had gazed at each other with the same childlike wonder in their eyes; Emmanuel and Marguerite must surely have met each other before in their dreams. Their eyes fell at once, and met again with the same unconscious avowal.

Marguerite took her mother's arm and spoke to her in a low voice to keep up the pretence of her errand; and from under shelter of her mother's wing, as it were, she turned, with a swanlike movement of her throat, to glance once more at Emmanuel, who still stood supporting his uncle.

The windows of the gallery had been distributed so that all the light should fall on the pictures, and the dimness of the shadows favored the stolen glances which are the delight of timid souls. Neither of them had, of course, advanced even in thought as far as the *if* with which passion begins; but both of them felt that their hearts were stirred with a vague trouble which youth keeps to itself, shrinking perhaps from disclosing the secret, or wishing to linger over its sweetness.

The first impression which calls forth the long-dormant emotion of youth is nearly always followed by a mute wonder such as children feel when, for the first time, they hear music. Some children laugh at first, and then grow thoughtful; others listen gravely for a while, and then begin to laugh; but there are souls who are destined to live for poetry or love, and they listen long, with a mute request to hear the music again; their eyes are lighted up with pleasure, or with a dawning sense of wonder at the Infinite. If we are always bound with all the force of early association to the spot where we first understood the beauty and mystery of sound; if we remember the musician and even the instrument with delight, how can we help loving the other soul that for the first time reveals the music of life to us? Does not the heart from which we draw our first breath of love become, as it were, our native country? Emmanuel and Marguerite were each for each that musical voice which awakens a sleeping sense; it was as if a hand had withdrawn the veil of cloud and pointed out to them the distant shore bathed in a noonday blaze of light.

When Mme. Claes made the Abbé pause for a moment before the picture of an angel by Guido, Marguerite leaned forward a little to see what Emmanuel thought of it, and Emmanuel glanced at Marguerite, comparing the mute thought shadowed forth on the painter's canvas with the thought revealed in the girl who stood there in life before him. She felt and understood the unconscious and delicious flattery. The old Abbé gravely praised the beautiful composition, and Mme. Claes replied; the young people were silent.

The mysterious dusk of the gallery, the quiet that brooded over the house, the presence of their elders, all the circumstances of their meeting, served to stamp it on the memory, and to deepen the vague outlines of a shadowy dream. All the confused thoughts that fell like rain in Marguerite's soul seemed to have spread themselves out like a wide, clear sea, which was lighted up by a ray of light when Emmanuel stam-

mered out a few words as he took leave of Mme. Claes. The young rich voice exerted a mysterious spell over her heart; the revelation was complete; it only rested with Emmanuel whether it should bear fruit for him; for the man who first awakens love in a girl's heart is often an unconscious instrument of fate, and leaves his work unfinished. Marguerite bowed in confusion; her good-bye was a glance that seemed to express her regret at losing this pure and charming vision. Like the child, she wanted to hear her music once again.

The leave-taking took place at the foot of the old staircase, before the parlor door, and from the parlor window she watched the uncle and nephew cross the court, and followed them with her eyes until the street door closed on them. Mme. Claes had been so deeply engrossed with the weighty matters which her director had come to discuss, that she had not thought of watching her daughter's face; and on the occasion of this second visit she was again full of such terrible trouble that she did not see in the red flush on Marguerite's face the indications of happiness and the workings of a girlish heart.

By the time the old Abbé was announced Marguerite had taken up her work again, and apparently found it so interesting that she greeted the uncle and nephew without raising her eyes from it. M. Claes returned the Abbé de Solis' bow mechanically, and left the parlor as if his presence were demanded elsewhere. The venerable Dominican seated himself beside Mme. Claes with one of those keen glances by which he seemed to read the depths of souls; he had scarcely seen M. Claes and his wife before he guessed that some catastrophe had taken place.

"Go into the garden, children," said the mother. "Marguerite, take Emmanuel to see your father's tulips."

Marguerite, somewhat embarrassed, took Félicie's hand in hers and looked towards the visitor, who reddened and followed her out of the parlor, catching up little Jean to keep

himself in countenance. When all four of them were out in the garden, Jean and Félicie scampered off, and Marguerite, left alone with young M. de Solis, went towards the bed of tulips which Le Mulquinier always planted out in the same way, year after year.

"Are you fond of tulips?" Marguerite asked, as Emmanuel seemed unwilling to break the silence.

"They are magnificent, mademoiselle; but a love of tulips is an acquired taste. The flowers dazzle me; I expect that it is because I am so used to working in my dark little room beside my uncle; I like softer colors better."

He looked at Marquerite as he uttered these last words; but in that glance, full of confused longings, there was no suggestion that the quiet face before him, with its white velvet surface and soft color, was like a flower.

"Do you work very hard?" Marguerite asked Emmanuel as they went towards a green-painted garden seat. "You will not be so close to the tulips here," she added; "they will not be so tiring to your eyes. You are right, the colors are dazzling; they make one's eyes ache."

"Yes, I work hard," the young man answered after a short pause, spent in smoothing the gravel on the path with his foot. "I work at all sorts of things. My uncle intended to make a priest of me——"

"Oh!" Marguerite exclaimed naively.

"I objected; I felt that I had no vocation. But it took a great deal of courage to cross my uncle's wishes. He is so kind and so very fond of me. Quite lately he paid for a substitute to save me from the conscription, and I am only a poor orphan nephew——"

"Then what do you mean to do?" asked Marguerite, with a sudden gesture, which seemed as if she would fain take the words back again, for she added—

"Pardon me, monsieur; you must think me very inquisitive."

"Oh! mademoiselle, nobody but my uncle has ever asked me the question," said Emmanuel, looking at her admiringly and gratefully. "I am to be a schoolmaster. There is no help for it; I am not rich, you see. If I can obtain a head-mastership in some school in Flanders, I shall have enough to live upon. I shall marry some woman who will be content with very little, and whom I shall love. That is the sort of life that is in prospect for me. Perhaps that is why I would rather have a moon-daisy from the fields about Orchies, a flower that no one looks at, than these glowing tulips, all purple and golden and emerald and sapphire. The tulips seem to me a sort of symbol of a brilliant and luxurious life, just as the moon-daisy is like a quiet, old-fashioned life, a poor school-master's life such as mine will be."

"Until now, I have always called the moon-daisies marguerites," said she.

Emmanuel de Solis flushed up to the eyes; he racked his brains for an answer, and tormented the gravel with his boots. So many things occurred to him, and were rejected as silly, that the pause grew embarrassing, and he was forced to say something. "I did not venture to pronounce your name——" he said at last, and got no further.

"A schoolmaster!" she went on.

"Oh! I shall be a schoolmaster for the sake of a secure position, mademoiselle, but I want to do other things as well, something great that wants doing.——I should like some bit of historical research best."

"Oh!"

That "Oh," which seemed to cover the speaker's private reflections, added to the young man's embarrassment. He began to laugh foolishly, and said—

"You are making me talk about my own affairs, mademoiselle, when I should speak to you of yourself."

"I think my mother and your uncle must have finished their talk," she said, looking at the parlor windows.

"Your mother looked very much altered, I thought."

"She is in trouble, and says nothing to us about her troubles, and we can only feel sorry for her, that is all we can do."

As a matter of fact, Mme. Claes had just consulted the Abbé de Solis on a difficult case of conscience, which he alone could resolve. Ruin was clearly impending; and now that the pictures were about to be sold, she thought of keeping back a large part of the purchase money as a sort of reserve fund to secure her children against want. Balthazar took so little heed of his affairs that it would be easy to do this without his knowledge. After mature deliberation, and after taking all the facts of the case into consideration, the old Dominican had given his sanction to this prudent course. The conduct of the sale devolved on him, and the whole matter was arranged privately for fear of injuring M. Claes' credit.

The old Abbé sent his nephew to Amsterdam duly armed with letters of introduction; and the young man, delighted to have this opportunity of doing a service to the house of Claes, succeeded in selling the collection in the picture gallery to the celebrated bankers, Happe and Duncker, ostensibly for the sum of eighty thousand Dutch ducats, but fifteen thousand ducats were to be paid secretly over and above this amount to Mme. Claes. The pictures were so well known that a single letter from Balthazar accepting the proposals made by Messieurs Happe and Duncker completed the bargain. Emmanuel de Solis was commissioned to receive the price of the pictures, which he remitted by other than the ordinary channels, so that Douai might know nothing of the transaction which had just taken place.

By the end of September, Balthazar had paid his debts, cleared his liabilities, and was at work once more; but the glory of the Maison Claes had departed. Yet Balthazar was so blinded by his passion that he seemed to feel no regrets;

he was so confident that he could retrieve all his losses in a little while, that he had reserved the right to repurchase his pictures. And as for Josephine, in her eyes the paintings were as nothing compared with the happiness of her husband and children; she filled the blank spaces in the gallery with pictures from the state apartments, and rearranged the furniture in the rooms where the family sat, so that the empty spaces on the walls should not be noticed.

Balthazar had about two hundred thousand francs with which to begin his experiments afresh, his debts were all paid, and M. de Solis and his nephew became trustees for Mme. Claes' reserve fund, which was swelled somewhat further, for gold was at a premium in those days of European wars, and the Abbé de Solis sold the ducats, receiving for them sixty-six thousand francs in crowns, which were stored away in the Abbé's cellar.

For eight months Mme. Claes had the sad satisfaction of seeing her husband entirely engrossed in his work; but she never recovered from the shock received that August afternoon, and fell into a decline, from which there was no recovery. Science had Balthazar in its clutches; the disasters that befell the armies of France, the first fall of Napoleon, the return of the exiled Bourbons, all the events of those eventful years could not draw his attention from his studies; he was no longer a citizen, as he had ceased to be a husband and a father. He was a chemist.

Towards the end of the year 1814 the wasting disease that had attacked Mme. Claes had made such progress that she could not leave her bed. She would not drag out this slow death in her own room where she had lived in her happier days, it was too full of memories, and she could not help drawing comparisons between the present and the past, which overwhelmed her with despair, so she lay downstairs in the parlor. The doctors had humored the desire of her heart, pronouncing the room to be more airy, cheerful, and conven-

ient than her own apartment; her bed had been placed between the chimney-piece and the window, so that she could look out into the garden. The last days of her life were spent in perfecting her work on earth, implanting in her daughters' hearts the passionate devotion of her own. She could no longer show her love for her husband, but she was free to lavish her affection on her daughters, and the charm of this life of close communion between mother and daughters was all the sweeter because it had begun so late.

The little scruples of a too sensitive affection weighed upon her, as upon all generous natures, like remorse. Her children had not always known, she thought, the love which was their due, and she tried to atone for all these imaginary wrongs; they felt her exquisite tenderness in her constant thought and care for them. She would fain have sheltered them in her heart, and nestled them beneath her failing wings, given them in one day the love that they should have had in those days when she had neglected them. Her soul was full of remorse, which gave a fervent warmth to her words and caresses; her eyes dwelt fondly on her children before the kind tones of her voice thrilled their hearts; her hand seemed always to be stretched out in benediction.

The hospitality of the Maison Claes had come to an end after the first splendid effort; Balthazar never gave another ball on the anniversary of his marriage, and saw no visitors; the house was quieter than ever, but this occasioned no surprise in Douai, for Mme. Claes' illness was a sufficient reason in itself for the change. The debts had been paid, and this had put a stop to gossip, and during the foreign occupation of Flanders and the war of the Hundred Days the chemist was completely forgotten. For two years Douai was almost in a state of siege, occupied in turn by French troops or foreign soldiers; it became a city of refuge for all nationalities and for peasants obliged to fly from the open country; people lived in fear for their property, and even in terror of

their lives, and in such a time of calamity and anxiety no one had a thought to spare for others. The Abbé de Solis and his nephew, and the two Pierquins, were Mme. Claes' only visitors.

The winter of 1814–1815 was a long and most painful agony for her. Her husband seldom came to see her. He sat with her after dinner, it is true, for a few hours; but she had not sufficient strength now to keep up a long conversation; and when he had repeated two or three remarks, which he never varied, he sat beside her without speaking, and the dismal silence in the parlor was unbroken. The only breaks in this dreary monotony were the evenings when the Abbé de Solis and his nephew came to the Maison Claes. The old Abbé played backgammon with Balthazar; while Marguerite, seated at her mother's bedside, talked with Emmanuel. Mme. Claes smiled on their innocent happiness, and would not let them see how sweet and how painful it was to her aching heart to feel the fresh breath of the dawn of love in the words that they let fall. The tones of the two young voices, so full of charm for the lovers, almost broke her heart; she surprised a glance of comprehension exchanged between them, and memories of her youth and the happy past brought her thoughts to the present, and she felt all its bitterness to the full as she lay there like one already dead. Emmanuel and Marguerite instinctively divined her sufferings, and delicacy of feeling led them to check the sweet playfulness of love lest it should add to her pain.

No one as yet seems to have discovered that our sentiments have a life of their own, and take their character from the circumstances which gave them birth; the places in which they gathered strength, the thoughts that filled our minds at the time, influence their development and leave their impress upon them. There is a love like that of Mme. Claes, passionate in its beginnings, and passionate to the end; there is a love, on which everything else smiles from the outset, that never loses

the glad freshness of its morning, and reaps its harvest of happiness amid laughter and rejoicing; but there is also a love early enveloped in sadness or surrounded by misfortune, its pleasures are painful and dearly-bought, snatched amid fears, embittered by remorse, or clogged with despair. This love in the depths of their hearts, which neither Marguerite nor Emmanuel recognized as yet, this feeling that had been awakened in a moment of stillness and silence beneath the dusky roof of the picture gallery, in the presence of the austere old Abbé, was tinged with something of the sober twilight hues of its earliest surroundings; it was grave and reticent, but full of subtle shades of sweetness, and furtive joys over which they lingered in secret as over stolen grapes snatched in some vineyard nook.

Beside this bed of pain they never dared to give expression to their thoughts, and all unconsciously their emotion gathered strength because it was repressed in the depths of their hearts, and only revealed itself in their care for the invalid. It seemed to Emmanuel that this drew them more closely together, and that he was already a son to Marguerite's mother; though instead of the sweet language of lovers he received only sad, grateful thanks from Marguerite. Their sighs of happiness as they exchanged glances were scarcely distinguishable from the sighs drawn from them by the sight of the mother's suffering; their brief moments of felicity, implied confessions, and unspoken promises, moments when their hearts went out towards each other, stood out, like the "Allegories" painted by Raphael, against a dark background. Each felt a trust and confidence in the other though no words had been said; they felt that the sun still shone, though heavy dark clouds had gathered overhead, and they knew not what wind would scatter them; the future seemed doubtful, perhaps trouble would dog them all their lives, so they sat timidly among the gloomy shadows without daring to ask, "Shall we finish the day together?"

Yet, beneath the tenderness that Mme. Claes showed for her children, there lay concealed other thoughts to which she nobly refused to listen. Her children never caused her apprehensions and terror; they were her comfort, but they were not her life; she lived for them, but she was dying for Balthazar. Painful though it might be for her to have her husband by her side, absent in thought for whole hours, to receive an unseeing glance from time to time, yet she was unconscious of her suffering so long as he was with her. Balthazar's indifference to his dying wife would have seemed unpardonable to any stranger who chanced to witness it, but Mme. Claes and her daughters were so used to it, and understood him so well, that they forgave him.

If Mme. Claes had some dangerous seizure in the course of the day, if she felt worse or seemed to be at the point of death, Claes was the one person in the house, or indeed in the whole town, who did not know that the wife who had once been so passionately loved was in danger. Le Mulquinier knew it, but Félicie and Marguerite had been forbidden by their mother to speak to Claes of her illness.

Mme. Claes was happy when she heard his footsteps in the picture gallery as he crossed it on his way to dinner; she was about to see him, she summoned all her strength to meet the coming joy. The color rushed to the pale face of the dying woman as he entered, she almost looked as she had been wont to do in health; the man of science came to her bedside and took her hand in his, and never saw her as she really was: for him alone she was always well. In reply to his, "How are you to-day, dear wife?" she would answer, "Better, dear!" and he in his preoccupied mood readily believed her when she spoke of getting up again, of being quite well to-morrow. He was so abstracted that he never saw that there was anything seriously wrong with his wife, and thought the disease of which she was dying was some passing ailment. Every one else knew that she was dying, but for him she was full of life.

This year saw the husband and wife completely severed. Claes slept in a distant room, lived in his laboratory or study from morning to night, and never saw Pepita save in the presence of his daughters and the few friends of the house who came to visit her. He had learned to do without her. The two who had once shared every thought drifted farther and farther apart; the moments of close communion, of rapture, of expansion, which are the life of the heart, came seldom and more seldom, and the rare moments of bliss ceased altogether. If physical suffering had not come to her aid and filled up the empty days, the anguish of her isolation might have killed Josephine, but she was dying. She was sometimes in such terrible pain that she was glad that he, whom she never ceased to love, was not there to be a witness of her sufferings. And for the part of the evening that Balthazar spent with her, she lay watching him, feeling that he was happy after his fashion, and this happiness which she had procured for him she made her own. This meagre satisfaction must suffice for her now; she no longer asked if she was beloved; she strove to believe it, and went softly, fearing that this thin sheet of ice should give way and her heart and all her hopes should be drowned in the dark depths that yawned beneath.

Nothing ever happened to break the monotony of the day; the disease that wasted Mme. Claes' strength perhaps contributed to the apparent peace, for her affection could only play a passive part, and weakness made it easier to wait and endure patiently. The year 1816 opened under these gloomy conditions.

In the last days of February came the sudden shock which brought the angelic woman, who, so the Abbé de Solis said, was almost sinless, to the grave. The blow came from Pierquin.

He watched for an opportunity when the two girls were sufficiently far away to whisper in her ear, "Madame, M. Claes has commissioned me to borrow three hundred thousand

francs on his estates; you must take measures to secure your children's property."

Mme. Claes clasped her hands and raised her eyes. She thanked the notary by a kindly inclination of the head and by a sad smile, which touched Pierquin. The words were like the stab of a knife; they killed Pepita. The rest of the day she spent with the painful thoughts that swelled her heart; she felt like some traveler who has walked steadily and bravely along the dizzy brink of a precipice, till some pebble slips from under his feet, and, losing his balance, he at last falls headlong into the depths. As soon as the notary left the house, Mme. Claes asked Marguerite for writing materials, and summoned all her strength to write her final directions and requests. Many times she stopped and looked up at Marguerite; the time for making her a confidant had come.

Marguerite had taken her mother's place as head of the household during this illness, and had more than realized the dying woman's hopes of her. Mme. Claes feared no longer for the family she was leaving under the care of this strong and loving guardian angel; she should still live on in Marguerite. Both the women doubtless felt that there were sad secrets to be told; whenever the mother glanced at Marguerite, the girl looked up at once, and the eyes of both were full of tears. Several times, as Mme. Claes laid down the pen, Marguerite had begun, "Mother?" and had broken off because her voice failed her; and her mother, absorbed in her last thoughts, did not hear her entreaty. At last the letter was finished; and Marguerite, who had held the taper while it was sealed, turned away to avoid seeing the direction.

"You can read it, my child!" the dying woman said, with a heartrending tone in her voice.

Marguerite watched her mother's fingers as she wrote, "For my daughter Marguerite."

"I will rest now," she added, putting the letter under her pillow, "and then we will talk."

She fell back on her pillows as if exhausted by the effort she had just made, and slept for several hours. When she awoke, all her children were kneeling around her in fervent prayer. It was a Thursday; Gabriel and Jean had just come home from school; Emmanuel de Solis—who for the past six months had been one of the masters there, teaching history and philosophy—had come with them.

"Dear children, we must bid each other farewell," she cried. "You are all with me to the last, and *he*——" She did not finish the sentence.

"M. Emmanuel," said Marguerite, who saw the deathly pallor of her mother's face, "will you tell our father that mamma is much worse?"

Young de Solis went up to the laboratory, and through Le Mulquinier's good offices saw Balthazar for a moment; the chemist heard the young man's urgent entreaties, and answered, "I am coming."

"My friend," Mme. Claes said when Emmanuel returned from this errand, "will you take my two boys away, and ask your uncle to come to me? I must take the last sacraments I think, and I should like to receive them from his hand."

When she was left once more with the two girls she made a sign which Marguerite understood. Félicie was sent away, and the mother and daughter were alone.

"I had something to say to you, mamma dear," said Marguerite, who did not realize how ill her mother was, and knew nothing of the shock which Pierquin's ill-advised revelation had given her. "I have been without money for housekeeping expenses these ten days past, and the servants' wages have not been paid for six months. I have twice made up my mind to ask papa for the money, and both times my courage failed. You do not know what has happened. All the wine in the cellar and the pictures in the gallery have been sold ——"

"He has not said a word about it to me!" cried Mme.

Claes. "God is taking me to Himself in time, but, oh! my poor children, what will become of you?"

She spent a few moments in fervent prayer; remorse seemed to glow in her eyes.

"Marguerite," she went on, drawing the sealed envelope from its hiding-place, "if, when I am dead, you should ever be brought to misery, that is to say, if you should want bread, then open this letter and read it. Marguerite dear, love your father, but take care of your sister and brothers. In a few days, perhaps in a few hours, you will be the head of the house! Be very careful; and, Marguerite, it may very likely happen that you will have to oppose your father's wishes; for he has spent large sums already on this effort to learn a secret which, if discovered, will make him famous and bring him enormous wealth, and he is sure to want money again; perhaps he will ask you for money; and then, while you must remember that you are the sole guardian of those whose interests are committed to your care, you must never forget what is due to your father, to a great man who is spending himself, his wealth, and his whole life in a task which will make his family illustrious, and you must give him all a daughter's tenderness. He would never wrong his children intentionally; he has such a noble heart; he is so good, so full of love for you; you, who are left, will see him a kind and affectionate father once more. These things must be said, Marguerite, now that I am on the brink of the grave. Promise me, my child, that you will fill my place, if you would make it easier for me to die; promise that you will never add to your father's troubles by a single reproach, that you will never judge him harshly! In short, you must be a gentle and indulgent mediator until your task is finished, until your father once more takes his place as head of the family."

"I understand, dearest mother," said Marguerite, as she kissed the dying woman's red eyelids. "I will do as you wish."

"And you must not marry, darling, until Gabriel is old enough to take your place," Mme. Claes went on. "If you were married, your husband very likely would not share your feelings; he might make trouble in the family, and harass your father."

Marguerite looked into her mother's eyes and said, "Have you no other counsels to give me with regard to my marriage?"

"Do you hesitate, dear child?" asked the dying mother in alarm.

"No," she answered; "I promise to obey you."

"Poor child!" said her mother, as she shed hot tears, "I could not bring myself to sacrifice myself for you, and now I am asking you to sacrifice yourself for them all. Happiness makes us selfish. Yes, Marguerite, I was weak, because I was happy. You must be strong; you must think for the rest, and so act that your brothers and your sister shall never reproach me. Love your father, and do not thwart him more than you can help."

"Her head fell back on the pillow, her strength had failed her, she could not say another word. The struggle between the wife and the mother had exhausted her. A few moments later the Abbé de Solis and his assistants entered the parlor, and the servants crowded in. The Abbé's presence recalled Mme. Claes to herself, and as the rite began she looked about her, seeking Balthazar among the faces about her bed.

"Where is the master?" she asked in a piteous tone, which sent a thrill of horror through those assembled; her whole life and death seemed to be summed up in that cry. Martha hurried from the room, and, old as she was, ran up to the laboratory, and knocked loudly at the door.

"Monsieur," she cried, in angry indignation, "madame is dying! They are going to administer the sacraments, and are waiting for you."

"I am coming down directly," said Balthazar.

Le Mulquinier appeared a moment later, and said that his

master was about to follow. Mme. Claes never took her eyes from the door all through the ceremony, but it was over before Balthazar came. The Abbé de Solis and the children were standing beside the bed, a flush came over the dying woman's face at the sight of her husband, the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"*Were you on the point of decomposing nitrogen?*" she asked with angelic sweetness, that sent a thrill through those about her.

"I have done it!" he cried triumphantly. "Nitrogen is partly composed of oxygen, partly of some imponderable substance which to all appearance is the essential principle of——"

He suddenly stopped, interrupted by a murmur of horror, which brought him to his senses.

"What was it that they told me?" he began. "Are you really worse?——What has happened?"

"This," said the Abbé de Solis indignantly in Balthazar's ear, "this—your wife is dying, and you have killed her!" and without waiting for an answer, the Abbé took Emmanuel's arm and left the room, the children went with him across the courtyard. Balthazar stood for a while as if thunderstruck; he gazed at his wife with tears in his eyes.

"You are dying, and I have killed you?" he cried. "What does he mean?"

"Dear," she answered, "your love was my life, and when all unconsciously you ceased to love me, my life ceased too."

The children had come back again; Claes sent them away, and sat down by his wife's pillow. "Have I ever ceased to love you for one single moment?" he asked, taking her hand, and pressing it to his lips.

"I have no reproaches to make, dearest. You have made me very happy, too happy indeed; for the contrast between the early days of our marriage, which were so full of joy, and these last years, when you have no longer been yourself, and

the days have been so empty, has been more than I could bear. Our inner life, like our physical life, has its vital springs. For the past six years you have been dead to love, to your family, to all that makes the happiness of life. I am not thinking of the joy and bliss which are the appanage of youth, and must cease with youth, but which leaves behind them the fruits on which the soul lives afterwards, an unbounded confidence and sweet established uses; you have deprived me of all these solaces of the after-time. Ah! well, it is time for me to go; this is not a life together in any sense; you have hidden your thoughts and your actions from me. How can you have come to feel afraid of me? Have I ever reproached you by gesture, or word, or deed! Well, and you have sold your remaining pictures, you have even sold the wine in the cellar, and you have begun to borrow money again on your property, without a word of all this to me! Oh, I am about to take leave of life, and I am sick of life? If you make mistakes, if in striving after the impossible you lose sight of everything else, have I not shown that there was enough love in my heart to find it sweet to share your errors, to be always by your side, even, if need be, in the paths of crime? You have loved me only too well, therein lies my glory and my misery. This illness began long ago, Balthazar; it dates from the day when you first made it clear to me, here in this room where I am about to die, that the claims of science were stronger than family ties. And now your wife is dying, and you have run through your fortune. Your fortune and your wife were your own to dispose of; but when I shall be no more, all my property will pass to your children, and you will not be able to touch it. What will become of you? I must tell you the truth, and dying eyes see far. Now that I am going, what will counter-balance this accursed passion, which is as strong in you as life itself? If I have been sacrificed to it, your children will count for very little; for, in justice to you, I must allow that I came first

with you. Two millions and six years of toil have been thrown into that bottomless pit, and you have discovered nothing——"

Claes' white head sank; he hid his face with his hand.

"You will discover nothing but shame for yourself and misery for your children," continued the dying woman. "Already they call you 'Claes the alchemist;' a little later, and it will be 'Claes the madman!' As for me, I believe in you; I know how great and learned you are; I know that you have genius, but ordinary minds draw no distinction between genius and madness. Glory is the sun of the dead; yours will be the fate of all greatness here on earth; you will know no happiness as long as you live. I am going now; I have had no joy of your fame, which would have consoled me for my lost happiness; and so, to sweeten the bitterness of death, let me feel certain that my children's bread is secure, my dear Balthazar. Nothing can give me peace of mind, not even your——"

"I swear," said Claes, "to——"

"No, dear, do not swear, lest you should fail to keep your word," she said, interrupting him. "It was your duty to protect us, and for nearly seven years you have failed to do so. Science is your life. Great men should have neither wife nor children; they should tread the paths of misery alone; their virtues are not those of commonplace people; such men as you belong to the whole world, not to one woman and a single family. You are like those great trees which exhaust the soil round about them, and I am the poor field-plant beside it that can never rear its head so high; I must die before half your life is spent. I have waited till my last hour to tell you these horrible truths, which have been revealed to me in anguish and despair. Have pity on our children! Again and again, until my last sigh, I entreat you to have pity on our children, that so my words may find an echo in your heart. This wife of yours is dying, you see. Slowly

and gradually she has starved for lack of affection and happiness. Alas! but for the cruel kindness which you have involuntarily shown me, could I have lived so long? But the poor children! They have never failed me; they have grown with the growth of my sorrows, and the mother has outlived the wife. Have pity, have pity on our children!"

"Le Mulquinier!" Balthazar thundered.

The old servant hurried into the room.

"Go up and break everything to pieces, all the machinery, and everything else. Be careful how you do it, but do it thoroughly! I will have nothing more to do with science!" he said, turning to his wife.

"It is too late," she said, with a glance at Le Mulquinier.

"Marguerite!" she moaned, feeling that death was near. Marguerite stood in the doorway, and gave a sharp cry as she met her mother's eyes and saw the ghastly pallor of her face.

"Marguerite!" the dying woman cried again. This last word she ever spoke, uttered with a wild vehemence, seemed like a solemn summons to her daughter to take her place.

The rest of the family hurried in alarm to the bedside, in time to see her die. Mme. Claes' life had ebbed away in the final effort she had made. Balthazar and Marguerite sat motionless, she at the head and he at the foot of the bed. The two who had best known her goodness and inexhaustible kindness could not believe that she was really dead. The glance exchanged between father and daughter was freighted with many thoughts; she judged her father, and her father trembled already lest his daughter should be the instrument of vengeance. Memories crowded upon him, memories of the love that had filled his life, and of her whose last words seemed to carry an almost sacred authority which had so stamped them on his soul that it seemed as if he must forever hear them ringing in his ears; but Balthazar mistrusted himself, he doubted whether he could resist the spirit which possessed him, he felt that the impulses of remorse had grown

weaker already at the first menaces of a return of his passion, and he was afraid of himself.

When Mme. Claes was gone, every one felt that she had been the life and soul of the Maison Claes, and that now that soul was no more. And the house itself, where her loss was felt to the full, the parlor where the noble Josephine still seemed to live was kept shut; nobody had the heart to enter it.

Society does not feel called upon to practice the virtues which it preaches to individuals; it offends hourly (though only in words) against its own canons; a jest prepares the way for base actions, a jest brings down anything beautiful or lofty to the ordinary level. If a son sheds too many tears for his father's loss, he is ridiculous; if too few, he is held up to execration; and then society, having said its say, diverts itself by weighing the dead, scarcely yet cold, in its balance.

On the evening of the day when Mme. Claes died her friends discussed her over their whist, dropped flowers on her tomb in a pause while the cards were dealing, and paid their tribute to her noble character while sorting hearts and spades.

Then, after the usual lugubrious commonplaces, which are a kind of preliminary vocal exercise in social lamentation, and which are uttered with the same intonations and exactly the same amount of feeling all over France at every hour of the day, the whole chorus proceeded to calculate the amount of Mme. Claes' property.

Pierquin opened the discussion by pointing out that the lamented lady's husband had made her life so wretched that death was a happy release for her, and that it was a still greater blessing for her children. She would never have had sufficient firmness to oppose the wishes of the husband whom she adored, but now her fortune had passed out of Claes' hands. One and all began forthwith to reckon the probable amount of poor Mme. Claes' fortune, to calculate her savings (had she, or had she not, managed to put anything by?), and made out inventories of her jewels, and ransacked her drawers and

her wardrobe, while her bereaved family were yet kneeling in prayer and tears by her bed of death.

With the experienced eye of a sworn valuer, Pierquin took in the situation at a glance. He was of the opinion that all Mme. Claes' property might be "got together again" (to use his own expression), and should amount to something like fifteen hundred thousand francs. A large part of this was represented by the forests of Waignies; that property had risen enormously in value in the last twelve years, and he made a rapid computation of the probable value of the trees of all ages from the oldest to the youngest. If that was not sufficient, Balthazar had probably enough to "cover" the children's claims. Mlle. Claes was, therefore, still, in his peculiar phraseology, a girl "worth four hundred thousand francs."

"But if she does not marry pretty soon," he added, "M. Claes will ruin his children; he is just the man to do it. If she were married she would be emancipated from her father's control, and could compel him to sell the forest of Waignies, to divide it among them, and to invest the shares of the minors in such a way that their father could not touch them."

Every one began to suggest the names of various young men of the province who might aspire to the hand of Mlle. Claes, but no one flattered the notary so far as to include him in the list. Pierquin raised so many objections to all the proposed suitors, and considered none of them worthy of Marguerite, that the company exchanged significant smiles, and amused themselves by teasing the notary, prolonging the process in provincial fashion. To Pierquin it seemed that Mme. Claes' death was likely to assist his cause, and he already began to cut up the dead for his own benefit.

"That good lady yonder," said he to himself, as he went home that night, "was as proud as a peacock; she would never have allowed me to marry a daughter of hers. Eh! eh! but if I play my cards well now, why should I not marry the girl? Old Claes has carbon on the brain, and does not

care what becomes of his children; if I ask him for his daughter, as soon as I have convinced Marguerite that she must marry for her brothers' and sister's sake, he will be glad enough to be rid of a girl who may give him a good deal of trouble."

He fell asleep in the midst of his meditations on the advantages of this match, so attractive to him on so many grounds, a marriage which bade fair to secure his complete happiness. It would have been hard to find a more delicately lovely or a better bred girl in the province. Marguerite was as modest and graceful as the fair flower which Emmanuel had not dared to mention before, lest he should reveal the secret wishes of his heart. She had religious principles and instinctive pride; his honor would be safe in her keeping. This marriage would not only gratify the vanity which enters more or less into every man's choice of a wife, but the notary's pride would be satisfied; an alliance with a twice-ennobled family, which bore one of the most distinguished names in Flanders, would reflect lustre upon him.

The very next morning Pierquin went to his strong box, and thence drew several notes of a thousand francs each, which he pressed on Balthazar, in order to spare his cousin any petty pecuniary annoyances in his grief. Balthazar would no doubt feel touched by the delicate attention, and speak of it to his daughter with an accompanying panegyric on the good qualities of the notary and his kindness of heart. But Balthazar did nothing of the kind. Neither M. Claes nor his daughter saw anything extraordinary in this action; they were so taken up with their grief that they scarcely gave a thought to Pierquin. Indeed, Balthazar's despair was so great that those who had been disposed to blame his previous conduct now relented and forgave him, not on the score of his devotion to science, but because of the tardy remorse which would never repair the evil. The world is quite satisfied with grimaces; it takes current coin without

inquiring too curiously whether or no the metal is base; the sight of pain has a certain dramatic interest, it is a sort of enjoyment in consideration of which the world is prepared to pardon everything, even to a criminal. The world craves sensation so eagerly that it absolves with equal readiness those who move it to laughter or to tears, without demanding a strict account of the means employed in either case.

Marguerite had just completed her nineteenth year when her father intrusted the management of the household into her hands; her brothers and sister remembered that their mother in the last moments of her life had bidden them obey their older sister, and her authority was dutifully recognized. Her delicate, pale face looked paler still by contrast with her mourning, as its sweet and patient expression was enhanced by sadness. From the very first it was abundantly evident that she possessed the womanly courage, the fortitude, and constant serenity which ministering angels surely bring to their task of healing, as they lay their green palm branches on aching hearts. But although she had early understood the duties laid upon her, and had accustomed herself to hide her sorrow, it was none the less deep; and the serenity of her face was little in keeping with the vehemence of her grief. It was to be a part of her early experience to know the pain of repressing the sorrow and love with which the heart overflows; henceforward the generous instincts of youth were to be curbed continually at the bidding of tyrannous necessity. After her mother's death she found herself involved at once in intricate problems where serious interests were at stake, and this at an age when a girl usually thinks of nothing but pleasure. The hard discipline of pain has never been lacking for angelic natures.

A love which has vanity and greed for its twin supporters is the most stubborn of passions. Pierquin meant to lose no time in surrounding the heiress. The family had scarcely put on mourning when he found an opportunity of speaking to

Marguerite; and began his operations with such skill, that she might well have been deceived by his tactics. But love had brought a faculty of clairvoyance, and Marguerite was not to be deceived, although Pierquin's good-nature, the good-nature of a notary who shows his affection by saving his client's money, gave some appearance of truth to his specious sentimentalities. The notary felt strong in his hazy relationship, in his acquaintance with family secrets and business affairs, in the esteem and friendship of Marguerite's father. The very abstractedness of that father, who was not likely to form any projects for his daughter's settlement in life, favored Pierquin's cause. He thought it quite impossible that Marguerite could have any predilection, and submitted his suit to her, though he was not clever enough to disguise beneath the flimsy veil of feigned passion the interested motives that had led him to scheme for this alliance, which are always hateful to young souls. In fact, they had changed places; the notary's revelation of selfishness was artless, and Marguerite was on her guard; for he thought that he had to do with a defenceless girl, and had no regard for the privileges of weakness.

"My dear cousin," he began, as he walked up and down the paths in the little garden, "you know my heart, and you know also how I shrink from intruding on your grief at such a moment. I ought not to be a notary, I am far too sensitive; I have such a feeling heart; but I am always forced to dwell on prosaic questions of interest when I would fain yield to the softer emotions which make life happy. It is very painful to me to be compelled to speak to you of matters which must jar upon your present feelings; but it cannot be helped. You have constantly been in my thoughts for the past few days. I have just discovered, by a curious chance, that your brothers' and your sister's fortunes, and even your own, are imperiled. It rests with you to save your family from utter ruin."

"What ought we to do?" she asked, somewhat alarmed at these remarks.

"You should marry," answered Pierquin.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," she exclaimed.

"You will marry," returned the notary, "after mature reflection on the critical condition of your affairs."

"How can my marriage save us from——?"

"That was what I was waiting to hear, cousin," he broke in. "Marriage emancipates a girl."

"Why should I be emancipated?" asked Marguerite.

"To put you in possession of your rights, my dear little cousin," replied the notary, with an air of triumph. "In that event you would take your share of your mother's fortune; and before you can take your share her property must be liquidated, and that would mean a forced sale of the forest of Waignies. That once settled, all the capital would be realized, and your father would be bound, as guardian, to invest your sister's share and your brothers' in such a way that chemistry could not touch it."

"And suppose that none of these things happen—what then?" asked she.

"Why, in that case," said the notary, "your father would administer the estate. If he takes it into his head again to make gold, there is nothing to prevent him from selling the forest of Waignies, and leaving you all as bare as shorn lambs. The forest of Waignies is worth about fourteen hundred thousand francs at this moment, but your father may cut down every stick of timber any day, and the thirteen hundred acres of land will not fetch three hundred thousand francs. This is almost sure to happen; and would it not be wiser to prevent it by raising the question at once, by emancipating yourself and demanding your share of the inheritance? You would save in other ways; your father would not fell the timber as he otherwise would do from time to time, to your prejudice. Just now chemistry is dormant, and of course he would invest

the money realized by the sale in consols. The funds are at fifty-nine, so the dear children would have very nearly five thousand livres of interest on fifty thousand francs. Besides, as it is illegal to spend a minor's capital, your brothers and sister would find their fortune doubled by the time they came of age. Now, on the other hand, my word! There you have the whole position! Not only so, but your father has dipped pretty heavily into your mother's property; and when the inventory is made out, we shall see what the deficit amounts to. If there is a balance owing, you can take a mortgage on his lands, and save something in that way."

"For shame!" said Marguerite; "that would be an insult to my father. It is not so long since my mother's last words were uttered, that I should have forgotten them already. My father is incapable of robbing his children," she added, with bitter tears in her eyes. "You do not know him, M. Pierquin."

"But suppose, my dear cousin, that your father betakes himself to chemistry again——"

"We should be ruined, should we not?"

"Oh! utterly ruined! Believe me, Marguerite," he said, taking her hand and pressing it to his heart; "believe me, I should fail in my duty if I did not urge this course upon you. Your interests alone——"

"Monsieur," returned Marguerite coolly, as she withdrew her hand, "the real interests of my family demand that I should not marry. That was my mother's decision."

"Cousin!" he cried, with the conviction of a man of business who sees a fortune squandered, "you are rushing on to your own destruction; you might as well fling your mother's money into the water. Well, for you I will show the devotion of the warm friendship I feel for you. You do not know how much I love you; I have adored you ever since I saw you on the day of the last ball that your father gave. You were charming! You may trust the voice of the heart when it speaks of your interests, dear Marguerite."

There was a moment's silence; then he went on, "Yes, we will summon a family council, and emancipate you without consulting you about it."

"But what does 'emancipation' mean?"

"It means that you will come into possession of your rights."

"Then, if I can be emancipated in this way, why would you have me marry? And to whom?"

Pierquin did his best to look tenderly at his cousin, but the expression of his face was so at variance with the hard eyes that usually only grew eloquent over money, that Marguerite fancied she saw an interested motive in this affectionate impromptu.

"You should marry a man whom you cared for, in your own circle," he got out. "You must have a husband, if it were only to manage your business affairs. You will be left face to face with your father; and can you hold your own against him, all by yourself?"

"Yes, monsieur; I shall find means to defend my brothers and sister when the time comes."

"Plague take the girl!" thought Pierquin to himself. Aloud he said, "No; you will never be able to stand out against him."

"Let us say no more about it," she replied.

"Good-bye, cousin. I shall do my best to serve you in spite of yourself; I shall show you how much I love you by preventing a misfortune which every one in the town foresees."

"Thank you for the interest you take in me, but I beg of you neither to say nor do anything that can give my father the slightest annoyance."

Marguerite thoughtfully watched Pierquin's retreating figure, and could not help comparing his metallic voice, his manners, supple as steel springs, his glances, which expressed servility rather than gentleness, with the mute revelation of

Emmanuel's feelings towards her, which impressed her as music or poetry might.

In every word we speak, in every action of our lives, there is a strange magnetic power which makes itself felt, and which never deceives. The glances, the tones of the voice, the lover's impassioned gestures, can be imitated; a clever actor may perhaps deceive an inexperienced girl, but to be successful he should have the field to himself. If there is another soul which vibrates in unison with every feeling that stirs her own, will she not soon find out the difference between love and its semblance? Emmanuel at this moment, like Marguerite herself, was under the influence of the clouds which had gathered about them ever since that first meeting in the picture gallery; the blue heaven of love was hidden from their eyes. He had singled her out for a worship which, from its very hopelessness, was tender, mysterious, and reverent in its manifestations. Socially he was too far beneath Mlle. Claes to hope to be accepted as her husband; he was poor, and had nothing but a noble name to offer her. Then he had waited and waited for some slight encouragement, which Marguerite would not give him beneath the eyes of a dying mother.

Equally pure, they had not as yet spoken a word of love. Their joys had been the secret joys which unhappy souls must perforce linger over alone. The same hope had, indeed, thrilled them both, but they had trembled and remained apart; they seemed to fear themselves, conscious that each belonged too surely to the other. Emmanuel, therefore, feared to touch with his lips the hand of the sovereign lady whom he had enshrined in his heart. The slightest careless contact would have brought such an intoxication of delight that his senses would have been beyond his control; he would no longer have been master of himself. But if they had never exchanged the slight yet significant, the innocent and solemn tokens of love which even the most timid lovers per-

mit themselves, each dwelt no less in the other's heart, and both knew that they were ready to make the greatest sacrifices, the only pleasures that they could know. Ever since Mme. Claes' death the love in the depth of their hearts had been shrouded in mourning. The gloom in which they lived had deepened into night, and every ray of hope was quenched in tears. Marguerite's reserve had changed to something like coldness, for she felt bound to keep the vow which her mother had demanded of her; and now that she had more liberty than formerly, she became more distant. Emmanuel had shared in her mourning, feeling with his beloved that the least word or wish of love at such a time would be treason against the sovereign laws of the heart. So this passionate love was hidden away more closely than ever. The two souls were in unison, but sorrow had come between them and separated them as effectually as the timidity of youth and respect for the sufferings of her who was now dead; yet there was still left to them the magnificent language of the eyes, the mute eloquence of self-sacrifice, the knowledge that one thought always possessed them both—sublime harmonies of youth, the first steps of love in its infancy.

Emmanuel came every morning for news of Claes and of Marguerite, but he never came into the dining-room, where the family now sat, unless he brought a letter from Gabriel, or Balthazar invited him to enter. Numberless sympathetic thoughts were revealed in his first glance at the girl before him; the reserve that compelled him to assume a conventional demeanor harassed him; but he respected it, and shared the sorrow which caused it, and all the dew of his tears was shed on the heart of his beloved in a glance unspoiled by any after-thought. He lived so evidently in the present moment, he set such high value on a happiness which he thought so fleeting, that Marguerite's heart sometimes smote her, and she told herself that she was ungenerous not to hold out her hand and say, "Let us be friends."

Pierquin still continued his importunities with the obstinacy which is the patience of dulness, possessed by one idea. He judged Marguerite by the ordinary rules of the multitude when judging of women. He imagined that when the words "marriage," "liberty," and "fortune" had been let fall in her hearing they would take root in her mind, and spring up and blossom into wishes which he could turn to his own advantage, and he chose to think that her coldness was nothing but dissimulation. But in spite of all his polite attentions, he was an awkward actor; he sometimes forgot his part, and assumed the despotic tone of a man who is accustomed to make the final decision in all serious questions relating to family life. For her benefit he repeated consoling platitudes, the professional commonplaces which creep like snails over a sorrow, and leave behind them a track of barren words that profane the sanctity of grief. His tenderness was simply cajolery; he dropped his feigned melancholy at the door when he put on his overshoes and took up his umbrella. He took advantage of the privileges which his long intimacy with the Maison Claes had given him, using them as a means of ingratiating himself with the rest of the family to bring Marguerite to make a marriage which was already talked of in the town. So in strong contrast to a true-hearted, devoted, and respectful love was opposed its selfish and calculating semblance. The characters of both men were in harmony with their manner. The one feigned a passion which he did not feel, and seized on every least advantage that gave him a hold on Marguerite; the other concealed his love, and trembled lest his devotion should be too apparent.

Some time after her mother's death, and, as it happened in one day, Marguerite had an opportunity of comparing the two men whom she was in a position to judge, for she was compelled to live in a social solitude which made her inaccessible to any who might have thought of asking her in marriage.

One day, after breakfast, on one of the sunniest mornings

of early April, Emmanuel chanced to call just as M. Claes was going out. Balthazar found his own house almost unendurable, and spent a large part of the day in walking about the ramparts. Emmanuel turned, as though he meant to follow Balthazar, hesitated, seemed to gather up his courage, glanced at Marguerite, and stayed. Marguerite felt sure that he wished to speak with her, and asked him to go into the garden; she sent Félicie to sit with Martha, who was sewing in the ante-chamber on an upper floor, and then seated herself on a garden seat in full view of her sister and the old duenna.

"M. Claes is as much absorbed by his grief as he used to be by science," said the young man as he watched Balthazar pacing slowly across the court. "Every one in Douai is sorry for him; he goes about like a man who has not got his wits about him; he suddenly stops short without a reason and gazes about him and sees nothing——"

"Every one expresses sorrow in a different way," said Marguerite, keeping back the tears. "What did you wish to say to me?" she added, with cold dignity, after a pause.

"Mademoiselle," Emmanuel replied in an unsteady voice, "I scarcely know if I have a right to speak to you as I am about to do. Please think only of my desire to serve you, and believe that a schoolmaster may be so much interested in his pupils as to feel anxious about their future. Your brother Gabriel is over fifteen now; he is in the second class; it is surely time to think about his probable career, and to arrange his course of study accordingly. The decision rests of course with your father, but if he gives it no thought, it may be a serious matter for Gabriel. And yet it would be a mortification to your father, would it not, if you pointed out to him that he was neglecting his son? So, as things are, could you not yourself consult Gabriel as to his inclinations, and help him to choose a course of study, so that if your father at a later day should wish him to enter the civil service or to make a soldier of him, Gabriel will be prepared for his post by a

special training? I am sure that neither you nor M. Claes would wish to bring up Cabriel in idleness——"

"Oh, no!" said Marguerite. "Thank you, M. Emmanuel, you are quite right. When our mother had us taught how to make lace, and took such pains with our drawing, sewing, music, and embroidery, she often said that we could not tell what might happen, and that we must be prepared for everything. Gabriel ought to have resources within himself, so he must have a thorough education. But what is the best career for a man to choose?"

Emmanuel trembled with happiness. "Mademoiselle," he said, "Gabriel is at the head of his class in mathematics; if he were to enter the *École Polytechnique*, I feel sure that he would acquire practical knowledge there which would be useful to him afterwards all through his life. He would be free to choose a career after his own inclinations after he had left the *École*, and you would have gained time without binding him down to any programme. Men who distinguish themselves there are always sought after. Diplomatists, scholars, administrators, engineers, generals, sailors, magistrates, manufacturers, and bankers are all educated at the *École*. So it is nothing at all extraordinary that a young man belonging to a great or wealthy family should study to qualify for admission. If Gabriel should make up his mind to this, I would ask you——will you grant me my request? Say, Yes."

"What is it?"

"Let me be his tutor?" he said nervously.

Marguerite looked at M. de Solis, then she took his hand and said, "Yes."

She was silent for a moment, then she added in an unsteady voice—

"How much I value the delicacy which has led you to offer something that I can accept from you. In all that you have just said I can see how much you have thought for us. Thank you."

Simply as these words were said, Emmanuel turned his head away lest Marguerite should see the tears of happiness in his eyes; he was overcome by the delight of being useful to her.

"I will bring them both to see you," he went on when he had recovered his self-possession. "To-morrow is a holiday." He rose and took leave of Marguerite, who shortly followed him to the house; as he crossed the court he still saw her standing by the dining-room door, and received a last friendly sign of farewell.

After dinner the notary came to call on M. Claes. Marguerite and her father were out in the garden, and Pierquin took up his position between them on the very bench where Emmanuel had sat that morning.

"My dear cousin," he said, addressing Balthazar, "I have come to talk about business to-night. Forty-two days have now elapsed since your lamented wife's demise——"

"I have not noticed how the time went," said Claes, brushing away a tear that rose at the technical term *demise*.

"Oh! monsieur," cried Marguerite, with a glance at the lawyer, "how can you?"

"But, my dear Marguerite, we lawyers are obliged to consider the limits of the time prescribed by law. This matter more particularly concerns you and your co-heirs. All M. Claes' children are under age, so within forty-five days of his wife's demise he is bound to have an inventory made out, so as to ascertain the value of the estate they held in common. How are we to find out if it is solvent or no, and whether there is enough to satisfy the minors' claims?"

Marguerite rose.

"Do not go away, cousin," said Pierquin; "this matter concerns you as well as your father. You know how deeply I feel your grief, but you must give your attention at once to these requirements of the law, otherwise you may both get into serious trouble. I am simply doing my duty as legal adviser to the family."

"He is quite right," said Claes.

"The time expires in two days," Pierquin continued, "and I must set to work to-morrow to make out the inventory, if it is only to postpone the payment of legacy duty which the treasury will demand very shortly. The treasury is not disturbed by compunction, and has no heart; it sets its claws in us at all seasons. So my clerk and I will come here every day from ten to four with M. Raparlier the valuer. As soon as we have finished here in the town, we will go into the country. We can talk about the forest of Waignies by and by. So that is settled, and now let us turn our attention to another point. We must call a family council, and appoint a guardian. M. Conyncks of Bruges is your nearest living relative, but he unluckily has become a Belgian citizen. You ought to write to him, cousin, and find out whether the old gentleman has any notion of settling in France; he has a fine property on this side of the frontier; and you might perhaps induce him and his daughter to move into French Flanders. If he declines to make a change, I will see about arranging for a council of some of the nearer remaining relations."

"What is the use of an inventory?" asked Marguerite.

"To find out how the property stands, and ascertain the assets and debts. When it is all clearly scheduled, the family council takes such steps as it deems necessary on behalf of the minors——"

"Pierquin," said Claes, as he rose from the garden seat, "do anything that you think necessary to protect my children's interests, but spare us the distress of selling anything that belonged to my dear wife——"

He did not finish the sentence, but he spoke with so much dignity, there was such deep feeling in his tones, that Marguerite took her father's hand in hers and kissed it.

"I will return to-morrow, then," said Pierquin.

"Come and breakfast with us," said Balthazar. He seemed to be collecting scattered memories together, for in a moment

he exclaimed: "But in my marriage contract, which was drawn up according to the custom of Hainault, I released my wife from the obligation of making an inventory, in order to spare her the worry and annoyance, and it is quite probable that I was likewise released——"

"Oh! how fortunate!" cried Marguerite. "It would have given us so much trouble——"

"Very well," said Pierquin, who was rather put out; "we will look into your marriage contract to-morrow."

"Then you did not know of this?" said Marguerite, an inquiry which put an end to the interview, for the notary was so much embarrassed by his cousin's home-thrust that he was glad to abandon the discussion.

"The devil is in it!" said he to himself as he crossed the courtyard. "That man, for all his abstractedness, can find his wandering wits in the nick of time, and put a stop to our precautions against him. He will squander his children's money, it is as plain as that two and two make four. Talk of business to a girl of nineteen, and she gets sentimental over it! Here I am racking my brains to save the property of those children by regular means, by coming to an understanding with old Conyncks, and this is the end of it! I have thrown away all my chances with Marguerite; she is sure to ask her father why I wanted an inventory of the property, which she now fancies to be quite unnecessary, and Claes, of course, will tell her that lawyers have a craze for drawing up documents; that we are notaries first, and cousins and friends, and whatnot, afterwards, all sorts of rubbish, in fact."

He slammed the door, storming inwardly at clients who let their sentimentality ruin them.

Balthazar was right. The inventory did not take place. So nothing was done to limit or define the father's powers over his children's property.

Several months went by, and brought no changes to the

Maison Claes. Gabriel, under the able tuition of M. de Solis, studied hard, learned the necessary foreign languages, and prepared to pass the entrance examination at the *École Polytechnique*. Félicie and Marguerite lived in absolute retirement; but, nevertheless, they spent the summer at their father's country house, in order to economize. M. Claes was much occupied by his business affairs; he paid his debts, raising the money on his own property, and went to visit the forest of Waignies.

By the middle of the year 1817 his grief had gradually abated, and he began to feel depressed by the dulness and sameness of the life he led. At first he resisted temptation bravely, and would not allow himself to think of chemistry; but the love of science was only dormant, and in spite of himself his thoughts turned towards his old pursuits. Then he thought he would not begin his experiments; he would not take up his science practically, he would confine himself to theory; but the longer he dwelt with these theories, the stronger his passion grew, and he began to equivocate with himself. He asked himself whether he was really bound not to prosecute his researches, and remembered how his wife had refused his oath. He had certainly vowed to himself that he would make no further attempt to solve the great problem, but the road to success had never been so certain and so plain; was he not surely free to change his mind now that the way was clear? He was then fifty-nine years of age, and his idea possessed him now with the dogged fixity which slowly develops into monomania. Outward circumstances also combined to shake his wavering loyalty.

Europe was at peace. Men of science of various nationalities, cut off from all communication with each other by twenty years of wars, were now free to correspond and to communicate their discoveries and theories to each other. Science was making great strides. Claes found that modern discoveries had a bearing, which his fellow-chemists did not suspect,

upon the problem of the Absolute. Learned men who were devoting their lives to the solution of other scientific enigmas began to think, as he did, that light and heat, and galvanism and electricity, were only different effects of the same cause, and that all the various substances which had hitherto been regarded as different elements were merely allotropic forms of the same unknown element. The fear that some other chemist might effect the reduction of metals, and find the principle of electricity (two discoveries which would lead to the solution of the problem of the Absolute), raised the enthusiasm, which the people of Douai called a mania, to the highest pitch; only those who have felt a like passionate love of science, or who have known the tyranny of ideas, can imagine the force of the paroxysm. Balthazar's frenzy was but the more violent because it had been so long subdued, and now broke out afresh.

Marguerite, who had been watching her father very closely, divined this crisis, and opened the long-closed parlor. She thought that if they sat in that room once more, old painful memories of her mother's death would be awakened, and would act as a restraint, and she was to some extent successful. For a little while her father's grief was reawakened, and the inevitable plunge into the abyss was deferred, but it was only for a little while. She determined to go into society once more, and so to distract Balthazar's attention from these thoughts. Several good marriages were proposed for her, over which Claes deliberated, but Marguerite said that until she was twenty-five she would not marry. In spite of all his daughter's endeavors, in spite of remorseful inner struggles, Balthazar began his experiments again in the early days of the winter. At first they were conducted secretly, but it was not easy to hide such occupations as his from the inquisitive eyes of the maidservants.

One day, therefore, while Marguerite was dressing, Martha said to her, "Mademoiselle, it is all over with us! That

wretch of a Mulquinier (who is the devil himself in human shape, for I have never seen him cross himself) has gone up into the attic again. There is the master on the high road to hell! Heaven send that he may not be the death of you all, as he was the death of the poor dear mistress!"

"Impossible!" said Marguerite.

"Come and see their goings-on for yourself."

Mlle. Claes sprang to the window, and saw, in fact, a thin streak of smoke rising from the laboratory chimney.

"I shall be twenty-one in a few months' time," she thought, "and then our property must be squandered no longer; I must find a way to prevent it."

When Balthazar finally gave way to his passion, his respect for his children's interests was, of course, less of a restraint than his affection for his wife had been. Such barriers were easily overleaped, his conscience was more elastic, his passion had grown stronger. Glory, and hard work, and hope, and misery lay before him; he set out on his way with the energy of full and entire conviction. He felt so sure of the outcome of it all that he worked day and night, flinging himself into his pursuits with a zeal that alarmed his daughters; they did not know that a man's health seldom suffers from the work that he loves and does for its own sake.

As soon as her father began his experiments, Marguerite reduced the expenses of housekeeping, and became almost as parsimonious as a miser. Josette and Martha entered into her plans, and seconded her loyally. As for Claes, he was scarcely aware of these retrenchments; he did not notice that they had been reduced to the bare necessaries of life. He began by staying away from the family breakfast; then the whole day was spent in the laboratory, and he only came down to dinner, and sat for a few silent hours afterwards in the evening in the parlor with the two girls. He never spoke to them; he did not seem to hear them when they wished him good-night; he mechanically let them kiss him on both

cheeks. Such neglect as this might have brought about serious consequences if Marguerite had not wielded a mother's authority, if the love in her heart had not been a safeguard.

Pierquin had discontinued his visits entirely; in his opinion nothing could save his cousins from utter ruin. Balthazar's estates, which were worth about two hundred thousand crowns, and brought in sixteen thousand francs, were already incumbered with mortgages to the amount of three hundred thousand francs. Claes had inaugurated his second epoch of scientific enthusiasm by a heavy loan. At that moment his income just sufficed to pay the interest on his debts; and as, with the improvidence characteristic of men who live for an idea, he had made over all the rents of his farms to Marguerite to defray the expenses of the housekeeping, the notary calculated that the end must come in three years' time, when everything would go to rack and ruin, and the sheriff's officers would eat up all that Balthazar had left. Under the influence of Marguerite's coldness, Pierquin's indifference had almost become hostility. He meant to secure his retreat in case his cousin should grow so poor that he might no longer wish to marry her, and spoke of the Claes everywhere in a pitying tone.

"Poor things, they are in a fair way to be ruined," said he. "I did everything I could to save them; but, would you believe it? Mlle. Claes herself set her face against every plan by which the law could step in to secure those children from starvation."

Emmanuel, through his uncle's influence, had been appointed headmaster of the Collége de Douai, his own personal qualifications having eminently fitted him for the post. He came almost every evening to see the two girls, who summoned their old duenna to the parlor as soon as their father left them for the night. Always at the same hour they heard the knock at the door: young M. de Solis was never late. For the past three months Marguerite's mute gratitude and graciousness had given him confidence; he had developed, and was him-

self. His purity of soul shone like a flawless diamond, and Marguerite learned to know the full value of his steadfast strength of character, when she saw that it had its source in the depths of his nature. She saw the blossoms open out one by one; hitherto she had only known of them by their fragrance. Every day Emmanuel realized some hope of hers, new splendors lighted up the enchanted country of love, the clouds vanished, the sky grew clear and serene, unsuspected treasures which had been hidden in the gloom shone forth. For Emmanuel was more at his ease; he could display the winning grace of the heart, the infectious gaiety of youth, the simplicity that comes of a life of study, the treasures of a fastidious mind and unsophisticated nature, the innocent merriment that suits so well with youthful love. Marguerite and Emmanuel understood each other better; together they had explored the depths of their hearts, and had found the same thoughts, pearls of the same lustre, blended notes of harmony, as clear and sweet as the magic music which holds the divers spellbound under the sea. They had come to know each other through the interchange of ideas in the course of those evening talks, studying each other with a curiosity that grew to be a delicate imaginative sympathy. There was no bashfulness on either side, but perhaps some coquetry. The hours which Emmanuel spent with the two girls under Martha's eyes reconciled Marguerite to her life of anguish and resignation; the love that grew unconsciously was her support in her troubles. Emmanuel's affection expressed itself with the natural grace that is irresistible, with the delicate and delightful wit that reveals fresh phases of deep feeling, as the facets of a precious stone set free all its hidden fires; the wonderful devices that love teaches lovers, which render a woman loyally responsive to the hand of the artist who sets new life into the old forms, to the tones of the voice which give a new significance to a phrase each time it is repeated. Love is not merely a sentiment, it is an art. A

bare word, a hesitation, a nothing, reveals to a woman the presence of the great and sublime artist who can touch her heart without withering it. The farther Emmanuel went, the more charming were the ways in which his love expressed itself.

"I have outstripped Pierquin," he said one evening; "I am the bearer of bad tidings that he is going to bring, but I thought I would rather tell them myself. Your father has sold your forest to some speculators, who have taken the timber as it stands to sell again in smaller quantities; the trees have been cut down already, and all the trunks have been taken away. Three hundred thousand francs were paid down at once, and this was sent to Paris to discharge M. Claes' debts there; but in order to clear his debts entirely, he has been forced to assign to his creditors a hundred thousand francs out of the hundred thousand crowns still due to him on the purchase money."

Just at that point Pierquin came in.

"Well, my dear cousin," he said, "you are ruined, you see! I told you how it would be, but you would not listen to me. Your father has a good appetite; he only made one bite of your forest. Your guardian, M. Conyncks, is away at Amsterdam, where he is negotiating the sale of his Belgian estates, and while his back is turned Claes seizes the opportunity to do this stroke of business. It is hardly fair. I have just written to old Conyncks, but it will be all up with you by the time he gets here. You will be obliged to take proceedings against your father. It will not take very long to settle the affair in a court of law, but Claes will not come out of it very well; M. Conyncks will be compelled to take action, the law requires it in such cases. And all this has come of your wilfulness! Do you see now how prudent I was, and how devoted to your interests?"

"I have some good news for you, mademoiselle," said young de Solis in his gentle voice; "Gabriel has been admitted as a

pupil at the *École Polytechnique;* the difficulties which were raised at first have been cleared away."

Marguerite thanked him by a smile, and said, "Then I shall find a use for my savings. Martha," she added, speaking to the old servant, "we must begin at once to make ready Gabriel's outfit. Poor Félicie, we both must work hard," she said, with a kiss on her sister's forehead.

"He will return home to-morrow, and you will have him here for about ten days; on the 15th of November he must be in Paris."

"Cousin Gabriel is well advised," said the notary, as he scanned the headmaster; "he will have to make his way in the world. But now, my dear Marguerite, the honor of the family is at stake; will you listen to me this time?"

"Not if it is a question of marriage."

"But what will you do?"

"Nothing, cousin. What should I do?"

"You are of age."

"I shall be of age in a few days' time. Is there any course which you can suggest that will reconcile our interests with our duty to our father and with the honor of the family?"

"You can do nothing, cousin, without your uncle. That is clear. When he comes back to Douai I will call again."

"Good-evening, monsieur," said Marguerite.

"The poorer she grows, the more airs she gives herself," thought the notary. Aloud he said, "Good-evening, mademoiselle. M. de Solis, I have the honor to wish you good-day," and he went away without paying any attention to Félicie or to Martha.

When the door closed on him, Emmanuel spoke, with hesitation in his voice: "I have been studying the Code for the past two days," he said, "and I have taken counsel with an old lawyer, one of my uncle's friends. If you will allow me, I will go to Amsterdam to-morrow. Listen, dear Marguerite."

He had spoken her name for the first time. She thanked

him by a glance and a gentle inclination of the head, and listened smilingly, though her eyes were full of tears.

"You can speak before my sister," said Marguerite; "she has no need to learn resignation to a life of hardship and toil, she is so brave and sweet, but from this discussion she will learn how much we need all our courage."

The two sisters clasped each other's hands, as if to renew the pledge of the closer union brought about by a common trouble.

"Leave us, Martha."

"Dear Marguerite," Emmanuel began, and something of the happiness that he felt at thus acquiring one of the least privileges of affection could be felt in his voice, "I have the names and addresses of the purchasers, who have not yet paid the balance of the two hundred thousand francs for the felled timber. To-morrow, if you give your consent, a lawyer acting in M. Conyncks' name shall serve a writ of attachment on them. Your great-uncle will return in a week's time. He will call a family council and emancipate Gabriel, who is now eighteen. When that has been done, you and your brother will be in a position to demand your rights, and you can require your share of the proceeds of this sale of the wood. M. Claes could not refuse you the two hundred thousand francs which have been attached; as for the remaining hundred thousand francs, they could be secured to you by a mortgage on this house that you are living in. M. Conyncks will demand securities for the three hundred thousand francs which belong to Mademoiselle Félicie and to Jean, and your father will be obliged to mortgage his property in the plains of Orchies, which are already encumbered with a debt of a hundred thousand crowns. The law regards mortgages for the benefit of minors as a first charge, so everything will be saved. M. Claes' hands will be tied for the future; your landed property is inalienable; he will be unable to borrow any more money on his own, which will be mortgaged beyond their

value, and the whole arrangement will be a family affair; there will be no lawsuits and no scandal. Your father will perforce set about his investigations less recklessly, if, indeed, he does not give them up altogether."

"Yes," said Marguerite, "but how shall we live? There will be no interest paid on the hundred thousand francs secured to us on this house so long as we continue to live in it. The farms in the plains of Orchies will bring in just enough to pay interest on the mortgages. What shall we do?"

"Well, in the first place," said Emmanuel, "if you invest Gabriel's remaining fifty thousand francs in the funds, at present prices it will bring in four thousand livres; that will be sufficient to pay all his expenses at the *École* in Paris. Gabriel cannot touch the principal nor the money secured to him on this house until he comes of age, so you need not fear that he will squander a penny of it, and you will have one expense the less. In the second place, is there not your own share, a hundred and fifty thousand francs?"

"My father will be sure to ask me for them," she cried in dismay, "and I could not refuse him."

"Well, then, dear Marguerite, you can secure the money by robbing yourself. Invest it in the funds in your brother's name; it would bring you in twelve or thirteen thousand livres, and you could manage to live on that. An emancipated minor cannot touch his principal without the consent of the family council, so you will gain three years of freedom from anxiety. In three years' time your father will either have solved his problem, or, as is more probable, he will have given it up as hopeless; and when Gabriel comes of age he can transfer the stock into your name, and the accounts can be finally settled among the four of you."

Marguerite asked for an explanation of the provisions of the law which she could not understand at first, and again they went over every point. It was certainly a novel situa-

tion—two lovers poring over a copy of the Code, which Emmanuel had brought with him in order to make the position of minors clear to Marguerite. Love's penetration came to the aid of her woman's quick-wittedness, and she soon grasped the gist of the matter.

The next day Gabriel returned home. M. de Solis came also, and from him Balthazar heard the news of his son's admission to the *École Polytechnique*. Claes expressed his acknowledgments by a wave of the hand. "I am very glad to hear it," he said; "so Gabriel is to be a scientific man, is he?" and the head of the house returned to his laboratory.

"Gabriel," said Marguerite, as Balthazar went out, "you must work hard, and you must not be extravagant. Do as others do, but be very careful; and while you are in Paris spend your holidays with our friends and relations there, and do not contract the expensive habits which ruin young men. Your necessary expenses will amount to nearly a thousand crowns, so you will have a thousand francs left for pocket money. That should be enough."

"I will answer for him," said Emmanuel de Solis, laying his hand on his pupil's shoulder.

A month later M. de Conyncks and Marguerite had obtained all the required guarantee from M. Claes. Emmanuel's prudent advice had been approved and carried out to the letter. Balthazar felt ashamed of the sale of the forest. His creditors had harassed him, until he had been driven to take this rash step to escape from them; and now, when he was confronted with the consequences of his deeds, when he was face to face, moreover, with his stern cousin, who was inflexible where honor was concerned, he did all that was required of him. He was, in fact, not ill pleased to repair so easily the mischief he had half-unconsciously wrought. He put his signature to the various papers laid before him with the preoccupied air of a man for whom science was the one reality, and all things

else of no moment. He had no more foresight than the negro who sells his wife in the morning for a drop of brandy, and sheds tears over her loss in the evening. Apparently he could not look forward: even the immediate future was beyond his ken; he never stopped to ask himself what must happen when his last ducat has been thrown into the furnace, and prosecuted his researches as recklessly as before. He neither knew nor cared to know that the house in which he lived was his only in name, and, like his estates, had passed into other hands; he did not realize the fact that (thanks to the stringent regulations of the law) he could not raise another penny on the property of which he was in a manner the legal guardian.

The year 1818 went by, and no untoward event occurred. The two girls just managed to defray the necessary expenses of the housekeeping and of Jean's education with the interest of the money invested in Gabriel's name, which he punctually remitted every quarter. M. de Solis lost his uncle in the December of that year.

One morning Marguerite heard from Martha that her father had sold his collection of tulips, the furniture of the state apartments, and all their remaining plate. She was compelled to repurchase the necessary silver for daily use herself, and to have it marked with her own initials. Hitherto she had watched Balthazar's depredations in silence; but after dinner that evening she asked Félicie to leave her alone with her father, and when he had seated himself by the fireside as usual, Marguerite spoke. She had nerved herself for the trying ordeal of the impending struggle with her father.

"You are the master here, dear father," she said; "you can sell everything, even your children. We will all obey you without a murmur; but I must point out to you that we have no money left, that we have scarcely enough to live upon this year, and that Félicie and I have to work night and day to earn the money to pay for Jean's school expenses by the lace dress

which we are making. Father dear, give up your researches, I implore you."

"You are right, dear child; in six weeks they will come to an end. I shall have discovered the Absolute, or the Absolute will be proved to be undiscoverable. You will have millions——"

"But leave us bread to eat meanwhile," pleaded Marguerite.

"Bread? Is there no bread in the house?" said Claes in blank dismay. "No bread in the house of a Claes! What has become of all our property?"

"You have cut down the forest of Waignies. The ground has not been cleared as yet, so it brings in nothing, and the rents of the farms at Orchies are not sufficient to pay interest on the mortgages."

"Then how do we live?" he asked.

Marguerite held up her needle.

"The interest on Gabriel's money helps us," she added, "but it is not enough. I shall just make both ends meet at the end of the year if you do not overwhelm me with bills that I did not expect, for you say nothing about your purchases. I feel quite sure that I have enough to meet my quarterly expenses, it is all planned out so carefully—and then a bill is sent in for soda or potash, or zinc or sulphur, and all sorts of things."

"Have patience and wait another six weeks, dear child, and then I will be very prudent. You shall see wonders, my little Marguerite."

"It is quite time to think of your own affairs. You have sold everything; pictures, tulips, silver-plate—nothing is left to us; but at any rate you will not run into debt again?"

"I am determined to make no more debts."

"No more debts!" she cried. "Then there are debts?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing, mere trifles," he said, reddening, as he lowered his eyes.

For the first time in her life Marguerite felt humiliated by

her father's humiliation; it was so painful to her, that she could not bring herself to inquire into the matter; but a month later a messenger came from a Douai bank with a bill of exchange for ten thousand francs, which bore Claes' signature. When Marguerite asked for a day's delay, and expressed her regret that she had not received any notice and so was unprepared to meet the bill, the messenger informed her that Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville held nine others, each for a like amount, which would fall due in consecutive months.

"It is all over with us!" cried Marguerite, "the time has come."

She sent for her father, and walked restlessly up and down the parlor, speaking to herself, "A hundred thousand francs, or our father must go to prison!——What shall I do? Oh! what shall I do?"

Balthazar did not come. Marguerite grew tired of waiting, and went up to the laboratory. She paused in the doorway, and saw her father standing in a brilliant patch of sunlight in the middle of a vast room filled with machinery and dusty glass vessels; the tables that stood here and there were loaded with books and numbered and ticketed specimens of various substances; yet other specimens were heaped on the shelves, along the walls, or flung down beside the furnaces. There was something repugnant to orderly Flemish prejudices in all this confused litter. Balthazar's tall figure rose above a collection of flasks and retorts; he had thrown off his coat and rolled back his sleeves above the elbows like a workman, his shirt was unfastened, exposing his chest, covered with white hair. He was gazing with frightful intentness on an air-pump, from which he never took his eyes. The receiver of the instrument was covered by a lens constructed of two convex glasses, the space between them being filled with alcohol; the sunlight that entered the room through one of the panes of the rose window (the rest had been carefully blocked up) was thus focussed on the contents of the receiver. The plate of the

receiver was insulated, and communicated with the wire of a huge voltaic battery. Le Mulquinier was busy at the moment in shifting the plate of the receiver, so that the lens might be maintained in a position perpendicular to the rays of the sun; he raised his face, which was black with dust, and shouted, "Ah! mademoiselle, keep away!"

She looked at her father, who knelt on one knee before his apparatus, perfectly indifferent to the rays of sunlight that shone full on his face and lit up his hair until it gleamed like silver; his brows were knotted, every muscle of his face was tense with painful expectation. The strange things strewn around him, the mysterious machinery dimly visible in the semi-darkness of the rest of the attic, everything about her combined to alarm Marguerite.

"Our father is mad," she said to herself in her dismay.

Then she went up to him and whispered in his ear, "Send Le Mulquinier away."

"No, no, child, I want him; I am waiting to see the result of an experiment which has never been tried before. For the last three days we have been on the watch for a ray of sunlight; everything is ready, I am about to concentrate the solar rays on these metals in a perfect vacuum, submitting them simultaneously to the action of a current of electricity. In another moment, you see, I shall employ the most powerful agents known to chemistry, and I alone——"

"Oh, father! instead of reducing metal to gas, you should keep it to pay your bills of exchange——"

"Wait! wait!"

"But M. Mersktus is here, father; he must have ten thousand francs by four o'clock."

"Yes, yes, presently. It is quite right; I did sign a bill for some small amount which would fall due this month. I thought I should have discovered the Absolute before this. Good heavens! if only I had a July sun, the experiment would be over by this time."

He ran his fingers through his hair, the tears came into his eyes, and he dropped into an old cane-seated chair.

"That is quite right, sir," said Le Mulquinier. "It is all the fault of that rascally sun that won't shine enough, the lazy beggar."

Neither master nor man seemed to remember Marguerite's presence.

"Leave us, Mulquinier," she said.

"Ah!" cried Claes, "I have it! We will try a new experiment."

"Father, never mind the experiments now," said the young girl when they were alone. "Here is a demand for a hundred thousand francs, and we have not a farthing. Your honor is involved; you must come down and leave the laboratory. What will become of you if you are imprisoned? Shall your white hair and the name of Claes be soiled with the disgrace of bankruptcy? It shall not be, I will not have it, I will find strength to combat your madness; it would be dreadful to see you wanting bread in your old age. Open your eyes to our position; come to your senses at last!"

"Madness!" cried Balthazar, rising to his feet. A light shone in the eyes he fixed on his daughter's face, "*Madness!*" There was something so majestic in his manner as he repeated the word that his daughter trembled. He folded his arms. "Ah! your mother would never have uttered that word," he went on. "She did not shut her eyes to the importance of my researches; she studied science that she might understand me; she saw that I was working for humanity, that there was nothing selfish nor sordid in me. I see that a wife's love rises far above a daughter's affection; yes, love is the loftiest of all feelings. Come to my senses!" he went on, striking his breast. "When did I take leave of them? Am I not myself? We are poor, are we? Very well, my daughter, I choose to be poor; do you understand? I am your father, and you must obey me. You shall be rich again when I wish

it. As for your fortune, it is a mere nothing. When I find a solvent of carbon, I will fill the parlor down stairs with diamonds, but even that is a pitiful trifle compared with the wonders for which I am seeking. Surely you can wait when I am doing my utmost, and spending my life in superhuman efforts to——"

"Father, I have no right to ask an account of the four millions which have melted away in this garret. I will say nothing of my mother, but your science killed her. If I were married, I should no doubt love my husband as my mother loved you; I would sacrifice everything for him, just as my mother sacrificed everything for you. I am doing as she bade me, I have given you all I had to give; you have had proof of it, I would not marry lest you should be compelled to render an account of your guardianship. But let us say no more about the past, let us think of the present. You have brought things to a crisis, and I have come here to put it before you. We must have money to meet these bills; do you understand me? There is absolutely nothing left but the portrait of our ancestor Van Claes. I have come in my mother's name; my mother, whose heart failed her when she had to struggle for her children's sake against their father's will, bade me resist you; I have come in my brothers' name and my sister's; father, I have come in the name of all the Claes to bid you cease your experiments, and to retrieve your losses before you turn to chemistry again. If you steel yourself against me, if you use your authority over us only to kill us—your ancestors, and your own honor plead for me, and what can chemistry urge against the voices of your family? I have been your daughter but too well," Marguerite replied with stern emphasis.

"And now you mean to be my executioner," he said in a feeble voice.

Marguerite turned and fled. She could not trust herself to play her part any longer; her mother's voice rang in her ears,

"Love your father, and do not cross him—more than you can help!"

"Here is a pretty piece of work of mademoiselle's," said Le Mulquinier, as he came down into the kitchen for his breakfast. "We had just about put our finger on the secret; we only wanted a blink of July sunlight, and the master—ah! what a man that is! he stands in the shoes of Providence, as you may say. There was not *that*," he said to Josette, clicking his thumb-nail against his front teeth, "between us and the secret, when, presto! up she comes and makes a fuss about some nonsensical bills——"

"Good, then," cried Martha, "pay them yourself out of your wages!"

"Am I to eat dry bread? Where is the butter?" demanded Le Mulquinier, turning to Josette.

"And where is the money to buy it with?" the cook answered tartly. "What, you old villain, if you can make gold in your devil's kitchen, why don't you make butter? It is not near so hard to make, and it would fetch something in the market, and go some way towards making the pot boil. All the rest of us are eating dry bread. The young ladies are living on dry bread and walnuts, and you want to be better fed than your betters? Mademoiselle has only a hundred francs a month to spend for the whole household; there is only one dinner for us all. If you want luxuries, you have your furnaces upstairs, where you fritter away pearls, till they talk of nothing else all over the town. Just look for your roast fowls up there!"

Le Mulquinier took up his bread and left the kitchen.

"He will buy something with his own money," said Martha; "all the better, it is so much saved. Isn't he a stingy old heathen?"

"We must starve him, that is the only way," said Josette. "He has not waxed a single floor this week, that he hasn't; he is always up above, and I am doing his work; he may just

as well pay me for it by treating us to a few herrings: if he brings any home I shall look after them."

"Ah!" said Martha, "there is Mlle. Marguerite crying. Her old wizard of a father would gobble down the house without saying grace. In my country they would have burned him alive for a sorcerer long before this; but they have no more religion here than Moorish infidels."

In spite of herself, Mlle. Claes was sobbing as she came through the gallery. She reached her room, sought for her mother's letter, and read as follows:

"My Child.—If God so wills, my spirit will be with you as you read these lines, the last that I shall ever write; they are full of love for my dear little ones, left to the mercy of a fiend who was too strong for me, a fiend who will have devoured your last morsel of bread, as he gnawed my life and my love! You knew, my darling, if I loved your father, and my love for him is failing now as I die, for I am taking precautions against him: I am doing that which I could not bring myself to confess in my lifetime. Yes, in the depths of my grave I treasure a last resource for you, until the day comes when you will know the last extremity of misfortune. If he has brought you to absolute want, my child; if the honor of our house is at stake, you must ask M. de Solis, if he is still living, or if not, his nephew, our good Emmanuel, for a hundred and seventy thousand francs, which are yours, and which will enable you to live. And if at last you find that nothing can check this passion, if the thought of his children's welfare proves no stronger a restraint than did a regard for my happiness, and he should wrong you still further, then leave your father, for your lives at any rate must not be sacrificed to his. I could not desert him; my place was at his side. It rests with you, Marguerite, to save the family; you must protect Gabriel, Jean, and Félicie at all costs. Take courage, be the guardian angel of the Claes; and you must be firm, Mar-

guerite, I dare not say be ruthless; but if the evil that has been already wrought is to be even partially repaired, you must save something, you must think of yourself as being on the brink of dire poverty, for nothing can stem the course of the passion which took all I had in the world from me. So, my child, out of the fulness of affection you must refuse to listen to the promptings of affection; you may have to deceive your father, but the deceptions will be a glory to you, there will be hard things to say and do, and you will feel guilty, but they will be heroic deeds if they are done to protect your defenceless brothers and sister. Our good and upright M. de Solis assured me of this, and never was there a clearer and more scrupulous conscience than his. I could never have brought myself to speak the words I have written, not even at the point of death. And yet—be tender and reverent in this hideous struggle; soften your refusals, and resist him on your knees. Not even death will have put an end to my sorrow and my tears. Kiss my dear children for me now that you are to become their sole guardian, and may God and all the saints be with you. JOSEPHINE."

A receipt was enclosed from the Messieurs de Solis, uncle and nephew, for the amount deposited in their hands by Mme. Claes, which they undertook to refund to her children if her family should present the document.

Marguerite called the old duenna, and Martha hurried upstairs to her mistress, who bade her go to ask M. Emmanuel de Solis to come to the Maison Claes.

"How noble and honorable he is!" she thought; "he never breathed a word of this to me, and he has made all my troubles and difficulties his."

Emmanuel came before Martha had returned from her errand.

"You have kept a secret which concerned me," she said, as she held out the paper.

Emmanuel bent his head.

"Marguerite, this means that you are in great distress?" he asked, and tears came to his eyes.

"Ah! yes. You will help me, you whom my mother calls 'our good Emmanuel,'" she said, as she gave him the letter; and, in spite of her trouble, she felt a sudden thrill of joy that her mother approved her choice.

"I have been ready to live or die for you ever since I saw you in the picture gallery," he answered, with tears of happiness and sorrow in his eyes; "but I did not know, and I waited, I did not even dare to hope that one day you would let me die for you. If you really know me, you know that my word is sacred, so you must forgive me for keeping my word to your mother; I could only obey her wishes to the letter, I had no right to exercise my own judgment——"

"You have saved us!" she broke in, as she took his arm, and they went down together to the parlor.

When Marguerite had learned the history of the trust fund she told him the whole miserable story of the straits to which they were reduced.

"We must meet the bills at once," said Emmanuel; "if they have been deposited with Mersktus, you will save interest on them. Then I will send you the remaining seventy thousand francs. My poor uncle left me that amount in gold ducats, so it will be easy to bring them here, and no one will know about it."

"Yes," she said, "bring them at night; our father will be asleep, and we can hide them somewhere. If he knew that I had any money, he might take it from me by force. Oh! Emmanuel, to be suspicious of one's own father," she said, and burst into tears as she leaned her forehead against his breast.

It was in this piteous and gracious entreaty for protection that Marguerite's love spoke for the first time; love had been surrounded from its first beginnings by sorrow, and had grown

familiar with pain, but her heart was too full, and at this last trouble it overflowed.

"What is to be done? What will become of us? He sees nothing of all this; he has not a thought for us nor for himself, for I cannot think how he can live in the garret, it is like a furnace."

"But what can you expect of a man who at every moment of his life cries, like Richard III., 'My kingdom for a horse?'" answered Emmanuel. "He will be inexorable, and you must be equally unyielding. You can pay his bills, and let him have your fortune if you will, but your brothers' and sister's money is neither yours nor his."

"Let him have my fortune!" she repeated, grasping Emmanuel's hand in hers, and looking at him with sparkling eyes. "This is *your* advice to me? And Pierquin told me lies without end, for fear I should part with it."

"Alas!" he said, "perhaps I too am selfish after my own fashion. Sometimes I would have you without a penny, for it seems to me that so you would be nearer to me; sometimes I would have you rich and happy, and then I feel how poor and petty it is to think that the empty pomp of wealth could keep us apart."

"Dear! let us talk no more about ourselves——"

"Ourselves!" he exclaimed in ecstasy; then after a moment he went on, "The evil is great, no doubt, but it is not irreparable."

"It lies with us to repair it; the family has no longer a head. He has utterly forgotten all that he owes to himself and his children, and has lost all sense of right and wrong—for he who was so high-minded, so generous, and so upright, who should have been his children's protector, has squandered their property in defiance of the law. To what depths he must have fallen! Good God! what can he expect to find?"

"Unluckily, dear Marguerite, however culpable he may be as the head of a family, he is quite right from a scientific

point of view to act as he does. Some score of men perhaps in all Europe are capable of understanding him and admire him, though every one else says that he is mad. Still, you are perfectly justified in refusing to surrender the children's money. There is an element of chance in every great discovery. If your father still persists in working out his problem, he will discover the solution without this reckless expenditure, and very possibly just at the moment when he gives it up as hopeless."

"It is well for my poor mother that she died!" said Marguerite. "She would have suffered a martyrdom a thousand times worse than death. The first shock of her collision with science killed her, and there seems to be no end to the struggle——"

"There will be an end to it," said Emmanuel, "when you have absolutely nothing left. There will be an end to M. Claes' credit, and then he will be forced to stop."

"Then he may as well stop at once," said Marguerite, "for we have nothing left."

M. de Solis bought up the bills and gave them to Marguerite. Balthazar came down to dinner a few minutes earlier than usual. For the first time in two years his daughter saw traces of emotion on his face, and his distress was painful to see. He was once more a father; reason had put science to flight. He gave a glance into the courtyard, and then into the garden; and when he was sure that they were alone, he turned to his daughter with sadness and kindness in his face.

"Dear child," he said, taking her hand and pressing it with earnest tenderness, "forgive your old father. Yes, Marguerite, I was in the wrong, and you were altogether right. I have not discovered the secret, so there is no excuse for me. I will go away from here. I cannot look on and see Van Claes sold," he went on, and his eyes turned to the martyr's portrait. "He died for the cause of freedom, and I shall die for science; he is revered, I am hated——"

"Hated, father? Oh! no," she cried, throwing her arms about him; "we all adore you, do we not, Félicie," she asked of her sister, who came into the room at that moment.

"What is it, father dear?" asked the little girl, slipping her hand into his.

"I have ruined you all——"

"Eh!" cried Félicie, "the boys will make a fortune for us. Jean is always at the head of his class."

"Wait a moment, dear father," Marguerite added, and with a charming caressing gesture the daughter led her father to the chimney-piece, and drew several papers from beneath the clock; "here are your drafts, but you must not sign your name to any more bills, for there will be nothing left to pay them with another time——"

"Then you have some money?" Balthazar said in his daughter's ear, as soon as he had recovered from his surprise; and with all her heroism, Marguerite's heart sank at the words. There was such frenzy of joy, and hope, and expectation in her father's face; his eyes were wandering round the room as if in search of the money.

"Yes, father," she said sadly, "I have my fortune."

"Give it to me!" he cried, with an eagerness which he could not control; "I will give you back an hundredfold."

"Yes, I will give it to you," said Marguerite, looking at her father, who did not understand the meaning that lay beneath his daughter's words.

"Ah! my dear child," he said, "you have saved my life! I had thought out a final experiment, the one thing that remains to be tried. If I do not succeed this time, I must renounce the Quest of the Absolute altogether. Come here, darling, give me your arm; if I can compass it, you shall be the happiest woman in the world; you have given me fresh hopes of happiness and fame; you have given me power; I will heap riches upon you, and wealth, and jewels."

He clasped both her hands in his and kissed her forehead,

giving expression to his joy in caresses that seemed almost like abject gratitude to Marguerite. Balthazar had no eyes for any one else during the dinner; he watched her with something like a lover's fondness and alert attention; she could not move but he tried to read her thoughts and to guess her wishes, and waited on her with an assiduity which embarrassed her; there was a youthfulness in his manner which contrasted strangely with his premature old age. But in reply to his caresses and attentions, Marguerite could only draw his attention to their present distress, either by giving expression to her doubts, or by a glance at the empty tiers of shelves along the walls.

"Pshaw!" he said, "in six months' time we will fill them with gold-plate and wonders. You shall live like a queen in state. All the earth will be under our feet; everything will be ours. And all through you, my Marguerite. Margarita!" he mused smilingly, "the name was prophetic. Marguerite means a pearl. Sterne said that somewhere or other. Have you read Sterne? Would you care to read Sterne? It would amuse you."

"They say that pearls are a result of some disease," she said bitterly, "and we have already suffered much."

"Do not be sad; you will make the fortune of those you love; you will be rich and great——"

"Mademoiselle has such a good heart," said Le Mulquinier, and his colander countenance was distorted by a smile.

The rest of the evening Balthazar spent with his daughters, and for them exerted all his powers of conversation and the charm of his personality. There was something magnetic in his looks and tones, a fascination like that of the serpent; the genius and the kindly wit that had attracted Josephine were called into play; he seemed, as it were, to take his daughters to his heart. When Emmanuel de Solis came, he found a family group; the father and children were talking as they had not done for a long time. In spite of himself, the young

headmaster fell under the spell of the scene; it was impossible to resist Balthazar's manner, de Solis was carried away by it. Men of science, however, deeply absorbed in watching quite other phenomena, bring highly-trained powers of perception to the least details of daily life. Nothing escapes their observation in their own sphere; they are not oblivious, but they keep to their own times and seasons, and are seldom in touch with the world that lies beyond that sphere; they know everything, and forthwith forget it all; they make forecasts of the future for their own sole benefit, foresee the events that take others by surprise, and keep their own counsel. If, while to all appearance they are unconscious of what is passing, they make use of their special gift of observation and deduction, they see and understand, and draw their own inferences, and there is an end of it; work claims them again, and they seldom make any but a blundering use of their knowledge of the things of life. At times when they are roused from their social apathy, or if they happen to drop from the world of ideas to the world of men and women, they bring with them a well-stored memory, and are by no means strangers to what is happening there.

So it was, manifestly, with Balthazar. He had quick sympathies as well as keen-sightedness, and knew the whole of his daughter's life; he had guessed or learned in some way the almost imperceptible events of the course of the mysterious love that bound her to Emmanuel; he let the lovers feel that he had guessed their secret, and sanctioned their affection by sharing in it. From Marguerite's father this was the sweetest form of flattery, and they could not resist it. The evening thus spent was delightful after the troubled and anxious life the poor girls had led of late. When Balthazar at last left them, after they had basked, as it were, for a while in the sunlight of his presence, and bathed in his tenderness, Emmanuel de Solis' constrained manner changed; he emptied his pockets of three thousand ducats, of which he had been

uneasily conscious. He set them down on Marguerite's work-table, and she covered them with some house-linen which she was mending. Then he went back for the remainder. When he returned, Félicie had gone to bed. It was past eleven o'clock, and Martha, who was sitting up for her mistress, was still busy in Félicie's room.

"Where shall I hide it?" asked Marguerite; she could not resist the temptation of passing the coins through her fingers, a childish freak, a moment's delay, which cost her dear!

"Those pedestals are hollow," said Emmanuel; "I will raise the column off its base, and we will slip the gold inside it: no one will think of looking there for it."

But just as Marguerite was making the last journey but one between the work-table and the pedestal, she gave a shrill cry and let the piles of ducats fall, the paper in which they were wrapped gave way, and the gold coins rolled in all directions over the floor; her father was standing in the doorway: his eager look terrified her.

"What are you doing?" he asked, looking from his daughter, who stood transfixed with terror, to the startled de Solis, who had hastily risen to his feet—too late, his kneeling position at the foot of the pedestal had been sufficient to betray him.

The din of the falling gold rang hideously in their ears; the coins lay scattered abroad on the floor, a sinister augury of the future.

"I thought so," said Balthazar; "I felt sure that I heard the rattle of gold."

He was almost as excited as the other two; one thought possessed them both, and made their hearts beat so violently that the sounds could be heard in the great silence which suddenly fell in the parlor.

"Thank you, M. de Solis," said Marguerite, with a glance of intelligence, which said: "Play your part; help me to save the money."

"What!" cried Balthazar, with a clairvoyant glance at his daughter and Emmanuel, "then this gold——?"

"Belongs to M. de Solis, who has been so good as to lend it to me that we may fulfil our engagements," she answered.

M. de Solis reddened, and turned as if to go.

"Monsieur," said Balthazar, laying a hand on his arm, "do not slip away from my grateful thanks."

"You owe me no thanks, M. Claes. The money belongs to Mlle. Marguerite; she has borrowed it of me on security," he answered, looking at Marguerite, who thanked him by an almost imperceptible movement of her eyelids.

"I cannot allow that," said Claes, taking up a pen and a sheet of paper from the table where Félicie had been writing. He turned to the two bewildered young people.

"How much is there!" he asked.

Balthazar's ruling passion had made him craftier than the most cunning of deliberate scoundrels; he meant to have the money in his own hands. Marguerite and Emmanuel de Solis hesitated.

"Let us count it," said Balthazar.

"There are six thousand ducats," Emmanuel said.

"Seventy thousand francs," returned Claes.

Marguerite and Emmanuel exchanged glances, and Emmanuel took courage.

"M. Claes," he said respectfully, "your note of hand is worth nothing—pardon the technical expression. This morning I lent mademoiselle a hundred thousand francs to buy up the bills which you were unable to meet, so evidently you are not in a position to give me any security. This money belongs to your daughter, who can dispose of it as seems good to her; but I have only lent it with the understanding that she will sign a document giving me a claim on her share of the land at Waignies, on which the forest once stood."

Marguerite turned her head away to hide the tears that

filled her eyes. She knew Emmanuel's purity of heart. He had been brought up by his uncle in the most scrupulous practice of the virtues prescribed by religion; she knew that he held lies in special abhorrence; he had laid his life and his heart at her feet, and now he was sacrificing his conscience for her.

"Good-night, M. de Solis," said Balthazar; "I had not looked for suspicion in one whom I regard almost with a father's eyes."

Emmanuel gave Marguerite a piteous glance, and then crossed the courtyard with Martha, who closed and bolted the house door after the visitor had gone.

As soon as the father and daughter were alone together, Claes said—

"You love him, do you not?"

"Father, let us go straight to the point," she said. "You want this money? You shall never have any of it," and she began to gather up the scattered ducats, her father helping her in silence. Together they counted it over, Marguerite showing not a trace of distrust. When the gold was once more arranged in piles, Claes spoke in the tones of a desperate man—

"Marguerite, I must have the gold!"

"If you take it from me, it will be theft," she said coolly. "Listen to me, father; it would be far kinder to kill us outright than to make us daily endure a thousand deaths. You see, one of us must give way——"

"So you would murder your father," he said.

"We shall have avenged our mother's death," she said, pointing to the spot where Mme. Claes had died.

"My child, if you only knew what is at stake, you would not say such things as these to me. Listen! I will explain what the problem is. But you would not understand!" he cried in despair. "After all, give it to me; believe in your father for once. Yes, I know that I gave your mother pain;

I know that I have squandered (for that is how ignorant people put it) my own fortune and made great inroads into yours; I know that you think I am working for what you call madness, but, my angel, my darling, my love, my Marguerite, just listen to me! If I do not succeed this time, I will put myself in your hands; all that you desire I will do; I will give to you the obedience that you owe to me; I will do your bidding, and administer my affairs as you shall direct; I will be my children's guardian no longer; I will lay down my authority. I swear it by your mother!" he said, shedding tears as he spoke.

Marguerite turned her head away; she could not bear to see his tears; and Claes, thinking that this was a sign of yielding, flung himself on his knees before her.

"Marguerite! Marguerite! give me the gold! Give it to me to save yourself from eternal remorse. What are twenty thousand francs? You see, I shall die; this will kill me. Listen to me, Marguerite! My promise shall be religiously kept. I will give up my experiments if I fail; I will go away; I will leave Flanders, and even France, if you wish it. I will begin again as a mechanic, and build up my fortune *sou* by *sou*, so that my children may recover at last all that science will have taken from them," he earnestly and piteously cried.

Marguerite tried to persuade her father to rise, but he still knelt to her, and continued, with tears in his eyes—

"Be tender and devoted this once; it is the last time. If I do not succeed, I myself will acquiesce in your harsh judgment. You can call me a madman, a bad father; you can say that I am a fool, and I will kiss your hands; beat me if you will, I will bless you as the best of daughters, remembering that you have given me your very life-blood."

"Ah!" she cried, "if it were only my life-blood, you should have it; but how can I look on and see my brothers and sister murdered in cold blood for science? I cannot!

Let it end!" she cried, drying her tears, and putting away her father's caressing hand from her.

"Seventy thousand francs and two months!" he said, rising in anger; "I want no more than that! and my daughter bars my way to fame, my daughter stands between wealth and me. My curse upon you!" he went on, after a moment's pause. "You have neither a daughter's nor a woman's heart! You will never be a wife nor a mother!—— Let me have it! Say the word, my dear little one, my precious child. I will adore you!" and he stretched out his hand with horrible eagerness towards the gold.

"I cannot help myself if you take it by force, but God and the great Claes look down upon us now," said Marguerite, pointing to the portrait.

"Then live, if you can, when your father's blood will be on your head!" cried Balthazar, looking at her with abhorrence.

"He rose, looked round the parlor, and slowly left it; when he reached the door, he turned and came back as a beggar might, with an imploring gesture, a look of entreaty, but Marguerite only shook her head in reply.

"Farewell, my daughter!" he said gently; "try to live happily," and he left the room, passing up the staircase with slow and measured steps.

When he had gone, Marguerite stood for a while in dull bewilderment; it seemed as if her whole world had slipped from her. She was no longer in the familiar parlor; she was no longer conscious of her physical existence; her soul had taken wings and soared to a world where thought annihilates time and space, where the veil drawn across the future is lifted by some divine power. It seemed to her that she lived through whole days between each sound of her father's footsteps on the staircase; and when she heard him moving above in his room, a cold shudder went through her. A sudden warning vision flashed like lightning through her brain; she

fled noiselessly up the dark staircase with the speed of an arrow, and saw her father pointing a pistol at his head.

"Take it all!" she cried, as she sprang towards him.

She fell into a chair. At the sight of her white face, Balthazar began to weep—such tears as old men shed; he was like a child; he kissed her forehead, speaking incoherent, meaningless words; he almost danced for joy, and tried to play with her as a lover plays with the mistress who has made him happy.

"Enough of this, father!" she said; "remember your promise! If you do not succeed, will you obey my wishes?"

"Yes."

"Oh, mother!" she cried, turning to the door of Mme. Claes' room, "you would have given it all to him, would you not?"

"Sleep in peace," said Balthazar; "you are a good girl."

"Sleep!" she cried; "the nights that brought sleep are gone with my youth. You have made me old, father, just as you gradually blighted my mother's life."

"Poor little one! If I could only give you confidence, by explaining the results I hope to obtain from a grand experiment that I have just planned, you would see then——"

"I see nothing but our ruin," she said, rising to go.

The next day was a holiday at the Collége de Douai. Emmanuel de Solis came with Jean to see them.

"Well?" he asked anxiously, as he went up to Marguerite.

"I gave way," she said.

"My dear life," he answered, half-sorrowfully, half-gladly, "if you had not yielded, I should have admired you, but I adore you for your weakness."

"Poor, poor Emmanuel! what remains for us?"

"Leave everything to me," he cried, with a radiant glance. "We love each other; it will be well with us."

Several months went by in unbroken peace. M. de Solis made Marguerite see that her retrenchments and petty econo-

mies were absolutely useless, and advised her to live comfortably, and to use the remainder of the money which Mme. Claes had deposited with him for the expenses of the household. All through those months Marguerite was harassed by the anxiety which had proved too heavy a burden for her mother; for, little as she was disposed to believe in her father's promises, she was driven to hope in his genius. It is a strange and inexplicable thing that we so often continue to hope when we have no faith left. Hope is the flower of desire, and faith is the fruit of certainty.

"*If* my father succeeds, we shall be happy," Marguerite told herself; Claes and Le Mulquinier said, "We shall succeed!" but Claes and Le Mulquinier were alone in their belief. Unluckily, Balthazar grew more and more depressed day by day. Sometimes he did not dare to meet his daughter's eyes at dinner; sometimes, on the other hand, he looked at her in triumph. Marguerite spent her evenings in seeking explanations of legal difficulties, with young de Solis as her tutor; she was always asking her father about their complicated family relationships. At last her masculine education was complete; she was ready with plans to put into execution if her father should once more be worsted in the duel with his antagonist—the Unknown X.

About the beginning of July, Balthazar spent a whole day on a bench in the garden, absorbed in sad thoughts. Once and again he looked about him, at the bare garden beds, which had once been gay with tulips, at the windows of his wife's room, and shuddered, doubtless at the recollection of all that this quest had cost him. He stirred from time to time, and it was plain that he thought of other things than science. Just before dinner, Marguerite took up her needlework, and came out to sit beside him for a few minutes.

"Well, father, you have not succeeded?"

"No, my child."

"Ah!" Marguerite said gently, "I am not going to utter

a word of reproach; indeed, we are both equally to blame; but I must claim the fulfillment of your promise; your promise is surely sacred—you are a Claes. Your children will never show you anything but love and respect; but from to-day you are in my hands, and must do as I wish. Do not be anxious; my rule will be mild, and I will do my best to bring it quickly to an end. I am going to leave you for a month—Martha is going with me—so that I may see after your affairs," she added, with a kiss, "for you are my child now, you know. So Félicie will be left in charge. Poor child! she is barely seventeen; how can she resist you? Be generous, and do not ask her for a penny, for she has nothing beyond what is strictly necessary for the housekeeping expenses. Take courage; give up your investigations and your theories for two or three years, your ideas will mature, and by that time I shall have saved the necessary money, and the problem shall be solved. Now, then, tell me, is not your queen a kind and merciful sovereign?"

"So all is not yet lost!" the old man answered.

"No, if you will only keep your word."

"I will obey you, Marguerite," said Claes, deeply moved.

Next morning M. Conyncks came from Cambrai for his grand-niece. He had come in his traveling carriage, and only stayed in his cousin's house until Marguerite and Martha could complete the preparations for their journey. M. Claes made his cousin welcome, but he was evidently downcast and humiliated. Old M. Conyncks guessed Balthazar's thoughts; and as they sat at breakfast, he said, with clumsy frankness—

"I have a few of your pictures, cousin; I have a liking for a good picture; it is a ruinous mania, but we all have our weaknesses——"

"Dear uncle," remonstrated Marguerite.

"They say you are ruined, cousin; but a Claes always has treasures here," he said, tapping his forehead, "and here too, has he not?" he added, laying his hand on his heart.

"I believe in you, moreover, and having a few spare crowns in my purse, I am using them in your service."

"Ah!" cried Balthazar, "I will repay you with treasures."

"The only treasures we have in Flanders, cousin, are patience and hard work," said Conyncks sternly. Our ancestor there has the two words graven on his forehead," he added, as he pointed to the portrait of Van Claes.

Marguerite kissed her father and bade him good-bye, gave her last parting directions to Josette and Félicie, and set out for Paris with her great-uncle. He was a widower with one daughter, a girl of twelve, and the owner of an immense fortune; it was not impossible that he might think of marrying again, and the good people of Douai believed that Marguerite was destined to be his second wife. Rumors of this great match for Marguerite reached Pierquin's ears, and brought him back to the Maison Claes. Considerable changes had been wrought in the views of that wide-awake worthy.

Society in Douai had been divided for the past two years into two hostile camps. The noblesse formed one group, and the bourgeoisie the other; and, not unnaturally, the latter cordially hated the former. This sharp division, in fact, was not confined to Douai; it suddenly split France into two rival nations, small jealous squabbles assumed serious proportions and contributed not a little to the widespread acceptance of the Revolution of July, 1830. There was a third party occupying an intermediate position between the ultra-Monarchical and ultra-Liberal camps, to wit, the officials who belonged socially to one or other circle, but who, on the downfall of the Bourbons from power, immediately became neutral. At the outset of the struggle between the noblesse and the bourgeoisie the most unheard-of splendor was displayed at coffee parties. The Royalists made such brilliantly successful efforts to eclipse their Liberal rivals that these epicurean festivities were said to have cost some enthusiastic

politicians their lives; like ill-cast cannon, they could not stand such practice. Naturally the two circles became more and more restricted and fanatical.

Pierquin, though a very wealthy man as provincial fortunes go, found himself excluded from the aristocratic circle and driven back upon the bourgeoisie. His self-love had suffered considerably in the process; he had received rebuff upon rebuff; gradually the men with whom he had formerly rubbed shoulders dropped his acquaintance. He was forty years of age, the limit of time when a man who contemplates marriage can think of taking a young wife. The matches to which he might aspire were among the bourgeoisie, but his ambition looked longingly back towards the aristocratic world from which he had been thrust, and he cast about for a creditable alliance which should reinstate him there. The Claes family lived so much out of the world that they knew nothing of all these social changes. Claes, indeed, belonged by birth to the old aristocracy of the province, but it seemed not at all likely that, absorbed as he was by scientific interests, he would share in the recently introduced class prejudices. However poor she might be, a daughter of the house of Claes would bring with her the dower of gratified vanity, which is eagerly coveted by all parvenues.

Pierquin, therefore, renewed his visits to the Maison Claes. He had made up his mind to this marriage, and to attain his social ambitions at all costs. He bestowed his company on Balthazar and Félicie in Marguerite's absence, and discovered, rather late in the day, that he had a formidable rival in Emmanuel de Solis. Emmanuel's late uncle the Abbé had left his nephew no inconsiderable amount of property, it was said; and in the eyes of the notary, who looked at everything from an undisguisedly material standpoint, Emmanuel in the character of his uncle's heir was a rival to be dreaded: Pierquin was more disquieted by Emmanuel's money than by his attractive personality. Wealth restored all its lustre to the

name of de Solis. Gold and noble birth were twin glories that reflected splendor upon each other. The notary saw that the young headmaster treated Félicie as a sister, and he became jealous of this sincere affection. He tried to eclipse Emmanuel, mingling conventional phrases of gallantry with the small talk of the day, and the airs of a man of fashion with the dreamy, pensive melancholy which was not ill suited to his face. He had lost all his illusions, he said, and turned his eyes on Félicie as if to let her know that she, and she alone, could reconcile him with life. And Félicie, to whom compliments and flattery were a novelty, listened to the language which is always sweet to hear, even when it is insincere; she mistook his emptiness for depth; she had nothing to occupy her mind, and her cousin became the object of the vague sentiments that filled her heart. Possibly, though she herself was not conscious of the fact, she was jealous of the attentions which Emmanuel showed her sister, and she wished to be likewise some man's first thought. Pierquin soon saw that Félicie showed more attention to him than to Emmanuel, and this encouraged him to persist in his attempt, until he went farther than he had intended. Emmanuel looked on, watching the beginning of this passion, simulated in the lawyer, artlessly sincere in Félicie, whose future was at stake. Whispered phrases were exchanged between the cousins when Emmanuel's back was turned, little colloquies, trifling deceptions, which gave to the stolen words and glances a treacherous sweetness that might give rise to innocent errors.

Pierquin hoped and intended to turn his intimacy with Félicie to his own account, and to discover Marguerite's reasons for taking the journey to Paris; he wanted to know whether there was any question of her marriage, and whether he must renounce his pretensions; but, in spite of his transparent manœuvres, neither Balthazar nor Félicie could throw any light on the subject, for the very sufficient reason that they themselves knew nothing of Marguerite's plans; on her

accession to power she seemed to have adopted the maxims of statecraft, and had kept her own counsel.

Balthazar's brooding melancholy and depression made the evenings tedious. Emmanuel had succeeded in persuading him to play at backgammon, but Balthazar's thoughts were elsewhere all the while; and, as a rule, the great chemist, with all his intellectual powers, seemed positively stupid. His expectations had come to nothing; his humiliation was great; he had squandered three fortunes; he was a penniless gambler; he was crushed beneath the ruins of his house, beneath the burden of hopes that were disappointed but not extinct. The man of genius, curbed by necessity, acquiescing in his own condemnation, was a tragic spectacle which would have touched the most unfeeling nature. Pierquin himself could not but feel an involuntary respect for this caged lion with the look of baffled power in the eyes which were calm by reason of despair, and faded from excess of light; there was a mute entreaty for charity in them which the lips did not dare to frame. Sometimes his face suddenly lighted up as he devised a new experiment; and then Balthazar's eyes would travel round the room to the spot where his wife had died, and tears like burning grains of sand would cross the arid pupils of his eyes, grown over-large with thought, and his head would drop on his breast. He had lifted the world like a Titan, and the world had rolled back heavily on his breast. This giant sorrow, controlled so manfully, had its effect on Pierquin and Emmanuel, who at times felt so much moved by it that they were ready to offer him a sum of money sufficient for another series of experiments—so infectious are the convictions of genius! Both young men began to understand how Mme. Claes and Marguerite could have flung millions into the abyss; but reflection checked the impulses of their hearts, and their good-will manifested itself in attempts at consolation which increased the anguish of the fallen and stricken Titan.

Claes never mentioned his oldest daughter, showed no uneasiness at her prolonged absence, and did not appear to notice her silence, for she wrote neither to him nor to Félicie. He seemed to be displeased if Solis or Pierquin asked him for news of her. Did he suspect that Marguerite was plotting against him? Did he feel himself lowered in his own eyes now that he had abdicated and made over his rights as a father to his child? Had he come to love her less because they had changed places? Perhaps all these things counted for something, and mingled with other and vaguer feelings which overclouded his soul; he chose to say nothing of Marguerite, as though she were in some sort of disgrace.

Great men, however great, known or unknown, lucky or unlucky in their endeavors, are still human, and have their weaknesses. Unluckily, too, they are condemned to suffer doubly, for their qualities as well as for their defects; and perhaps Balthazar was as yet unused to the pangs of a wounded vanity. The days, the evenings which all four spent together, were full of melancholy, and overshadowed by vague, uneasy apprehensions, while Marguerite was away. They were days like a barren waste; they were not utterly without consolations, a few flowers bloomed here and there for them to pluck, but the house seemed to be shrouded in gloom in the absence of the oldest daughter, who had come to be its life and hope and strength. In this way two months went by, and Balthazar patiently awaited his daughter's return.

Marguerite came back to Douai with her uncle, who did not immediately return to Cambrai. Doubtless he meant to give support to his niece in an impending crisis. Marguerite's return was the occasion of a small family rejoicing. The notary and M. de Solis had been invited to dinner by Félicie and Balthazar; and when the traveling carriage stopped before the door of the house, all four appeared to receive the travelers with great demonstrations of joy. Marguerite seemed glad to be at home in her father's house again; tears

filled her eyes as she crossed the courtyard and went to the parlor. As she put her arms round her father's neck, other thoughts had mingled with the girl's kiss, and she blushed like a guilty wife who cannot dissemble; but when she saw Emmanuel, the troubled look died out of her eyes, the sight of him seemed to give her courage for the task she had secretly set herself. In spite of the cheerfulness on every face and the gaiety of the talk at dinner, father and daughter studied each other with distrust and curiosity. Balthazar did not ask Marguerite a single question as to her stay in Paris, paternal dignity doubtless prevented him; Emmanuel de Solis was equally discreet; but Pierquin, who had so long been acquainted with all the secrets of the family, did not avoid the subject, and concealed his inquisitiveness under an assumption of geniality.

"Well, dear cousin," he said, "did you see Paris, and the theatres——?"

"I saw nothing of Paris," she answered; "I only went out when I was obliged to go. The days went by very tediously for me; I was longing to see Douai again."

"If I had not made a fuss, she would not have gone to the opera; and when she did, she found it tiresome!" said M. Conyncks.

None of them felt at their ease that evening, the smiles were constrained, a painful anxiety lurked beneath the forced gaiety; it was a trying occasion. Marguerite and Balthazar were both tortured by doubts and fears, and the others seemed to feel this. As the evening wore on, the faces of the father and daughter betrayed their agitation more plainly; and though Marguerite did her best to smile, her nervous movements, her glances, the tones of her voice, betrayed her. M. Conyncks and Emmanuel de Solis seemed to understand the noble girl's agitation, and to bid her take courage by expressive glances; and Balthazar, hurt at not being taken into confidence while steps were taken and matters decided which

concerned him, gradually became more and more reserved, and at last sat silent among his children and friends. Shortly, no doubt, Marguerite would inform him of her decisions. For a great man and a father the situation was intolerable.

Balthazar had reached the time of life when things are usually freely discussed with the children of the family, when capacity for feeling is increased by wider experience of life; his face grew graver, more thoughtful, and troubled as the time of his extinction as a citizen drew nearer.

A crisis in the family life was impending, a crisis of which some idea can only be given by a metaphor. The clouds that bore a thunderbolt in their midst had gathered and darkened the sky, while they laughed below in the fields; every one felt the heat and the coming storm, looked up at the heavens, and hurried on his way.

M. Conyncks was the first to go, Balthazar went with him to his room, and Pierquin and Emmanuel took their leave in his absence. Marguerite bade the notary a friendly good-night; she said nothing to Emmanuel, but she clasped his hand tightly, and the tears stood in her eyes as she looked at him. She sent Félicie away, and when Claes came back to the parlor she was sitting there alone.

"My kind father," she said in a tremulous voice, "I could not have brought myself to leave home but for the gravity of our position; but now, after agonies of hope and fear, and in spite of unheard-of difficulties, I have brought back with me some chance of salvation for us all. Thanks partly to your name, partly to our uncle's influence, and the interest of M. de Solis, we have obtained the post of Receiver of Taxes in Brittany for you; it is worth eighteen to twenty thousand francs a year, they say. Our uncle has undertaken to be security for you. Here is your appointment," she added, drawing a paper from her reticule. "For the next few years we must retrench and be content with bare necessaries; you would find it intolerable to live on here in the house; our

father ought at least to live as he has always been accustomed to live. I shall not ask you to spare any of your income for us; you will spend it as seems good to you. But I entreat you to remember that we have no income, not a penny except from the amount invested in the funds for Gabriel—he always sends the interest to us. We will live as if the house were a convent; no one in the town shall hear anything about our economies. If you lived on here in Douai, you would be a positive hindrance to us in our efforts to restore comfort. Am I abusing the authority you gave to me when I put you in a position to re-establish your fortune yourself? In a few years' time, if you choose, you will be Receiver-General."

"So, Marguerite," Balthazar said in a low voice, "you are driving me out of my house——"

"I did not deserve such a bitter reproach," said Marguerite, controlling the emotions that surged up in her heart. "You will come back again among us as soon as you can live in your native town in a manner befitting your name. Besides, did you not give me your promise, father?" she went on coldly. "You must do what I ask of you. Our uncle is waiting to go with you to Brittany, so that you may not have to travel alone."

"I shall not go!" cried Balthazar, rising to his feet; "I stand in need of no one's assistance to re-establish my fortune and to pay all that is owing to my children."

"You had better go," said Marguerite, with no sign of agitation in her manner. "I ask you simply to think over our respective positions. I can put the case before you in a very few words; if you stay in the house, your children will go out of it, that you may be the master."

"Marguerite!" cried Balthazar.

"And the next thing to do," she went on, without heeding her father's anger, "will be to inform the minister of your refusal to accept a lucrative and honorable post. We should never have obtained it, in spite of interest and influence, if

our uncle had not adroitly slipped several notes for a thousand francs into a certain lady's glove——"

"All of you will leave me!"

"Yes. If you do not leave us, we must leave you," she answered. "If I were your only child, I would follow my mother's example; I would not murmur at my fate, whatever you might bring upon me. But my brothers and sister shall not die of hunger and despair under your eyes; I promised this to her who died there," she said, pointing to her mother's bed. "We have hidden our troubles from you, and endured them in silence, but our strength fails us now. We are not on the brink of a precipice; we are in its lowest depths, father! And if we are to extricate ourselves, we want something besides courage; all our efforts must not be continually thwarted by the freaks of a passion——"

"My dear children!" cried Balthazar, seizing Marguerite's hand, "I will help you; I will work with you; I——"

"This is the way," she answered, holding out the minister's letter.

"But, my darling, it would take too long to restore my fortune in this way that you are pointing out to me. The results of ten years of work will be lost, as well as the enormous sums of money which the laboratory represents. Our resources are up there," he said, indicating the garret.

Marguerite went towards the door, saying, "Choose for yourself, father!"

"Ah! my daughter, you are very hard!" he answered, as he sat down in an armchair; but he let her go.

Next morning Marguerite learned from Le Mulquinier that M. Claes had gone out. She turned pale at this simple announcement, and her face spoke so eloquently of cruel anxiety that the old servant said, "Do not alarm yourself, mademoiselle; the master said he would come back again at eleven o'clock to breakfast. He never went to bed at all last night. At two o'clock this morning he was standing by one of the

windows in the parlor looking out at the roof of the laboratory. I was sitting up, waiting in the kitchen; I saw him, he was crying, he is in trouble; and here is the famous month of July again, when the sun has power enough to make us all rich, and if you only——"

"That is enough!" said Marguerite. She knew now what the thoughts were that had harassed her father.

As a matter of fact, it had come to pass with Balthazar, as with all domestic people, that his life was inseparable, as it were, from the places which had become a part of it. His thoughts were wedded to his house and laboratory; he did not know how to do without the familiar surroundings; he was like a speculator, who is at a loss to know what to do with himself on public holidays when he cannot go on 'Change. All his hopes dwelt there in his laboratory; it was the one spot under heaven where he could breathe vital air. This clinging to familiar things and places, so strong an instinct in weak natures, becomes almost tyrannous in men of science and learning. Balthazar Claes was to leave his house; for him this meant that he must renounce his science and his problem, or, in other words, that he must die.

Marguerite was in the last extremity of anxiety and fear until breakfast-time. The thought of Balthazar's attempt to take his life after a similar scene came to her memory, and she feared that her father had found a tragic solution of his difficulties; she walked up and down in the parlor, and shuddered every time the bell rang at the door. Balthazar at last came back. Marguerite watched him cross the court, and, gazing anxiously at his face, could read nothing but the traces of all that storm of grief in its expression. When he came into the parlor she went up to him to wish him good-morning; he put his arms affectionately about her waist, drew her to his breast, kissed her forehead, and said in her ear—

"I have been to see about my passport."

The tones of her father's voice, his resignation, his caress

almost broke poor Marguerite's heart; she turned her head away to hide the tears which she could not keep back, fled into the garden, and only came back when she had wept at her ease. During breakfast Balthazar was in great spirits, like a man who has decided on his course.

"So we are to start for Brittany, uncle, are we?" he said to M. Conyncks. "I have always thought I should like to see Brittany."

"Living is cheap there," the old uncle remarked.

"Is father going to leave us?" cried Félicie.

M. de Solis came in with Jean at that moment.

"You will let him spend the day with us," said Balthazar, as Jean came to sit beside him; "I am going away to-morrow, and I want to bid him good-bye."

Emmanuel looked across at Marguerite, who hung her head. It was a melancholy day; every one felt sad; every one tried not to give way to painful thoughts or to tears. This was no ordinary parting; it was an exile. And then, every one instinctively felt how humiliating it was for a father thus to proclaim his losses by leaving his family and accepting the post of a paid official at Balthazar's time of life; but he was as magnanimous as Marguerite was firm, and submitted with dignity to the penance imposed on him for the errors which he had committed when carried away by his genius. When the evening was over, and the father and daughter were alone, Balthazar held out his hand to Marguerite. He had been as gentle and affectionate all through the day as in the happiest days of the past; and with a strange tenderness, in which despair was mingled, he asked, "Are you satisfied with your father?"

"You are worthy of *him*," answered Marguerite, turning to the portrait of Van Claes.

Next morning Balthazar, followed by Le Mulquiner, went into his laboratory to take leave of his cherished hopes. Master and man exchanged melancholy glances as they stood

on the threshold of the garret. Everything was in working order, as though those hopes had not yet perished, and they were about to leave it all, perhaps forever. Balthazar looked round at the apparatus about which his thoughts had hovered for so long; there was nothing there but had its associations for him, and had borne a part in his experiments or his investigations. Dejectedly he bade Le Mulquinier set free the gases, evaporate the more noxious acids, and take precautions against possible explosions. As he saw to all these details, bitter regrets broke from him, as from a man condemned to death when they are about to lead him to the scaffold.

"Just look!" he said, stopping before a capsule in which the two wires of a voltaic battery were immersed; "we ought to wait to see the result of this experiment. If it were to succeed my children would not drive their father from his house when he could fling diamonds at their feet. Hideous thought! Here is a combination of carbon and sulphur, in which the carbon plays the part of an electro-positive body; crystallization should commence at the negative pole, and in the case of decomposition the carbon would be deposited there in a crystalline form."

"Ah! that is what it will do!" said Le Mulquinier, looking admiringly at his master.

"But," Balthazar went on after a moment of silence, "the combination is submitted to the influence of that battery which might act——"

"If monsieur desires it, I will soon increase——"

"No, no; it must be left just as it is. That sort of crystallization requires time, and must be left undisturbed."

"Confound it! the crystallization is long enough about it!" cried the manservant.

"If the temperature were to fall, the sulphide of carbon would crystallize," Balthazar said, letting fall stray links of a chain of ideas which was complete in his own mind; "but suppose the action of the battery is brought to bear on it

under certain conditions which I do not know how to set up. ——This ought to be carefully watched;——it is possible.—— But what am I thinking of? There is to be no more chemistry for us, my friend; we must keep books in a receiver's office somewhere in Brittany."

Claes hurried away and went down stairs to breakfast in his own house for the last time. Pierquin and M. de Solis had joined them. Balthazar was anxious to put an end to the death-agony of science, said farewell to his children, and stepped into the carriage after his uncle; all the family came with him to the threshold of the door. There, as Marguerite clung to her father in despair, he answered her mute appeal, saying in her ear, "You are a good child; I bear you no ill-will, Marguerite."

Marguerite crossed the courtyard, and took refuge in the parlor; kneeling on the spot where her mother died, she made a fervent prayer to God to give her strength to bring the heavy task of her new life to a successful end. She felt stronger already, for an inner voice echoed the applause of angels through her heart, and with it mingled the thanks of her mother, her sister, and brothers. Emmanuel and Pierquin came in; they had watched the traveling carriage till it was out of sight.

"Now, mademoiselle, what will you do next!" inquired Pierquin.

"Save the family," she said simply. "We have about thirteen hundred acres of land at Waignies. I mean to have it cleared, and to divide it up into three farms, to erect the necessary farm buildings, and then to let them. I feel sure that in a few years' time, with plenty of patience and prudence, each of us three," she said, turning to her brother and sister, "will possess a farm of about four hundred acres, which some day or other will bring us in fifteen thousand francs yearly. My brother Gabriel's share must be this house and the consols that stand in his name. Then we will pay off our father's

debts by degrees, and give him back his estates when the time comes."

"But, dear cousin," said Pierquin, amazed at Marguerite's clear-headedness and calm summing-up of the situation, "you will want more than two hundred thousand francs if you are going to clear the land and build steadings and buy cattle. Where is the money to come from?"

"That is just where the difficulty comes in," she said, looking from the lawyer to Emmanuel de Solis; "I cannot venture to ask any more of my uncle; he has already become security for our father."

"You have friends!" cried Pierquin. It suddenly struck him that even yet the Claes girls were worth more than five hundred thousand francs apiece.

Emmanuel looked at Marguerite tenderly; but Pierquin, unluckily for him, was still a notary in the midst of his enthusiasm. He answered accordingly, "I can let you have two hundred thousand francs!"

Emmanuel and Marguerite sought counsel of each other by a glance, a glance that sent a ray of light through Pierquin's brain. Félicie blushed up to the eyes; she was so glad that her cousin had proved as generous as she had wished. Marguerite looked at her sister, and guessed the truth at once; during her absence the poor child's heart had been won by Pierquin's meaningless gallantry.

"You shall only pay me five per cent.," he added, "and repay me when you like; you can give me a mortgage on your farms. But do not trouble yourself about it; you shall have nothing to do but to pay the money when all the contracts are completed; I will find you some good tenants, and look after everything for you. I will do it all for nothing, and stand by you like a trusty kinsman."

Emmanuel made a sign to Marguerite, beseeching her to refuse this offer, but she was too much absorbed in watching the shades of expression that crossed her sister's face to notice

him. After a moment's silence she turned to the lawyer with an ironical glance, and answered of her own accord, to M. de Solis' great joy.

"You have stood by us, cousin," she said; "I should have expected no less of you; but we want to free the estates as quickly as possible, and the five per cent. interest would hamper us; I shall wait till my brother comes of age, and we will sell his stock."

Pierquin bit his lips; Emmanuel began to smile gently.

"Félicie, dear child, take Jean back to school," said Marguerite, glancing at her brother. "Take Martha with you. Be very good, Jean, my darling, and do not tear your clothes; we are not rich enough now to buy new ones for you as often as we used to do. There, run away, little man, and work hard at your lessons."

Félicie went out with her brother.

"Cousin," said Marguerite to Pierquin, "and you, monsieur," she added, turning to M. de Solis, "you have doubtless come to visit my father while I was away? I am grateful to you for this proof of your friendship, and I am sure that you will do no less for two poor girls who will stand in need of your advice. Let us understand each other clearly. When I am in Douai I shall always see you with the greatest pleassure; but when Félicie will be left here with no one but Josette and Martha, I need not tell you that she can receive no visitors, not even an old friend and a cousin so devoted to our interests. In our position we must not give the slightest occasion for gossip. We must give our minds to our work for a long time to come and live in solitude."

For several moments no one spoke. Emmanuel, deeply absorbed in watching Marguerite's face, was dumb; Pierquin was at a loss what to say, and took leave of his cousin. He felt furious with himself; he suddenly perceived that Marquerite loved Emmanuel, and that he had acted like the veriest fool.

"Look here, Pierquin, my friend," said he to himself, as he went along the street, "any one who called you an ass would say nothing but truth. What a stupid dolt I am! I have twelve thousand livres a year beside my professional income, to say nothing of my uncle des Racquets; all his money will come to me some of these days, and I shall have as much again then (after all, I don't want him to die, he is thrifty), and I was graceless enough to ask Mlle. Claes for interest! No! After all, Félicie is a sweet and good little thing, who will suit me better. Marguerite has a will like iron; she would want to rule me, and—she would rule me! Come, let us show ourselves generous, Pierquin, let us have less of the notary. I cannot shake off old habits. Bless me! I will fall in love with Félicie, those are my sentiments, and I mean to stick to them. Goodness, yes! She will have a farm of her own—four hundred and thirty acres of good land, for the soil at Waignies is rich, and before long it will bring in from fifteen to twenty thousand livres yearly. My uncle des Racquets dies (poor old gentleman!), I sell my practice, and I am a man of leisure worth fifty thousand livres a year,—fif—ty thou—sand livres! My wife is a Claes; I am connected with several families of distinction. *Diantre!* Then we shall see if Savaron de Savarus, the Courtevilles, and Magalhens will decline to visit a Pierquin-Claes-Molina-Nourho! I will be mayor of Douai; I shall have the Cross of the Legion of Honor; I can be a deputy, nothing will be beyond my reach. So look out, Pierquin, my boy, and let us have no more nonsense, inasmuch as, upon my honor, Félicie—Mademoiselle Félicie Van Claes is in love with you."

When the two lovers were alone, Emmanuel held out his hand, and Marguerite could not help laying her right hand in his. The same impulse made them both rise to their feet, and turn to go towards their bench in the garden; but in the middle of the parlor her lover could not control

his joy, and in a voice that trembled with emotion, he said to Marguerite—

"I have three hundred thousand francs that belong to you——"

"How is that?" she cried; "did my poor mother leave other sums for us in your keeping?——No?——Then how is this?"

"Oh! my Marguerite, what is mine is yours, is it not? Were you not the first to say *we?*"

"Dear Emmanuel!" she said, pressing the hand that she still held, and instead of going into the garden, she sat down in a low chair.

"It is I who should thank you," he said, with love in his voice, "since you accept it from me."

"Dear love," she said, "this moment atones for many sorrows, and brings us nearer to a happy future! Yes, I will accept your fortune," she continued, and an angelic smile hovered about her mouth; "I know of a way to make it mine."

She looked up at Van Claes' portrait, as if calling on her ancestor to be a witness. Emmanuel de Solis had followed the direction of her eyes; he did not see her draw a little ring from her finger; he did not notice that she had done so until he heard the words—

"Out of the depths of our sorrow one comfort has arisen; my father's indifference leaves me free to dispose of myself," she said, holding out the ring. "Take it, Emmanuel; my mother loved you, she would have chosen you."

Tears came to Emmanuel's eyes; he turned pale, fell on his knees, and said to Marguerite, as he gave her the ring that he always wore—

"Here is my mother's wedding ring" (and he kissed the little golden hoop). "My Marguerite, shall I have no pledge but this?" he asked, pointing to the ring she had given him.

She bent forward, and Emmanuel's lips touched her forehead.

"Alas! poor love, are we not doing wrong?" she said in a trembling voice. "We shall have to wait for a long while."

"My uncle used to say that adoration was the daily bread of patience; he spoke of the Christian's love of God; but in this way I can love you, Marguerite; for a long while the thought of you has mingled with the thought of God so that I cannot separate them; I am yours, as I am His."

For a few moments they remained rapt in the sweetest ecstasy. Their feelings were poured out as quietly and naturally as a spring wells up and overflows in little waves that never cease. The fate which kept the two lovers apart was a source of melancholy, which gave to their happiness something of the poignancy of grief. Félicie came back again, all too soon for them. Emmanuel, taught by the charming tact of love, which instinctively divines everything, left the two sisters together, with a glance in which Marguerite could read how much this consideration cost him—a glance that told her how long and ardently he had desired this happiness which had just been consecrated by the betrothal of their hearts.

"Come here, little sister," said Marguerite, putting her arm round Félicie's neck. They went together out into the garden, and sat down on the bench to which one generation after another had confided their love and grief, their plans and musings. In spite of her sister's gay tones and shrewd, kindly smile, Félicie felt something very like a tremor of fear. Marguerite took her hand, and felt that she was trembling.

"Mademoiselle Félicie," her older sister said in her ear, "I am reading your heart. Pierquin has been here very often while I was away; he came every evening, he has whispered sweet words, and you have listened to him."

Félicie blushed.

"Do not defend yourself, my angel," Marguerite answered; "it is so natural to love! Perhaps our cousin's character may alter under the influence of your dear soul; he is selfish, and thinks only of his own interests, but he is kind-hearted, and his very faults will no doubt conduce to your happiness, for he will love you as the fairest of his possessions, you will be a part of his business affairs. Forgive me for that word, darling! You will cure him of the bad habit of thinking of nothing but material interests by teaching him to occupy himself with the affairs of the heart."

Félicie could only put her arms round her sister.

"Besides," Marguerite went on, "he is well-to-do. He belongs to one of the most distinguished and oldest bourgeois families. And you cannot think that I would put obstacles in the way of your happiness, if you choose to find it in a sphere somewhat beneath you?"

"Dear sister!" broke from Félicie.

"Oh, yes; you may trust me!" cried Marguerite. "What more natural than that we should tell each other our secrets?"

These words, so heartily spoken, opened the way for one of those delightful talks in which young girls confide everything to each other. Love had made Marguerite quick to read her sister's heart, and she said at last to Félicie—

"Well, dear little one, we must make sure that the cousin really loves you, and then——"

"Leave it to me," said Félicie, laughing; "I have an example here before me."

"Little goose!" said Marguerite, kissing her forehead.

Pierquin belonged to the class of men who regard marriage as a business contract, a fulfillment of social duties, and a way of transmitting property; it was to him a matter of indifference whether he married Marguerite or Félicie, so long as both bore the same family name and possessed the same amount of dower; yet he was acute enough to see that both of them, to use his own expression, were "romantic and sen-

timental girls," two adjectives employed by commonplace people to ridicule the gifts which nature sows with a grudging hand in the furrows of the human field. Doubtless the lawyer concluded that he had best do at Rome as the Romans do; for the next day he came to see Marguerite, and with a mysterious air took her out into the little garden and began to talk "sentiment," since this was a necessary preliminary, according to social usages, to the usual formal contract drawn up by a lawyer.

"Dear cousin," said he, "we have not always been of one mind as to the best means of bringing you out of your difficulties, but you must acknowledge that I have always been prompted by a strong desire to serve you. Well, then, yesterday my offer of help was completely spoiled by an unlucky trick of speaking, due simply to a lawyer's habit of mind. Do you understand? My heart is not to blame for the absurd piece of folly. I have cared very much about you, and we lawyers have a certain quick-sightedness; I saw that you did not like what I said. It is my own fault! Some one else has been cleverer than I was. Well, I have come to tell you out and out that I love your sister Félicie. So you can treat me as a brother, dip in my purse, take what you will; the more you take, the better you will prove your regard for me. I am wholly at your service, *without interest*—do you understand? —of any sort or description. If only I may be thought worthy of Félicie, that is all I ask. Forgive me for my mistakes, they are due to business habits; my heart is right enough, and I would throw myself into the Scarpe rather than not make my wife happy." He spoke with every indication of sympathy and sincerity.

"This is very satisfactory, cousin; but the matter does not rest with me, it rests with my sister and father," said Marguerite.

"I know that, dear cousin," the notary answered, "but you are like a mother to them all; besides, I have nothing

more nearly at heart than that you should judge of mine correctly."

This way of speaking was characteristic of the honest notary. Later in life, Pierquin's reply to an invitation from the commanding officer at Saint Omer became famous; the latter had asked him to some military festivity, and Pierquin's response was worded thus: "Monsieur Pierquin-Claes de Molina-Nourho, Mayor of the city of Douai, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, will have *that* of being present," etc.

Marguerite accepted his offer only in so far as it related to his professional advice, fearing to compromise her dignity as a woman, her sister's future, or her father's authority. The same day she confided her sister to the care of Josette and Martha, who were devoted body and soul to their young mistress, and entered into all her plans of retrenchment; and Marguerite set out immediately for Waignies, where she began to put her schemes into execution at once, benefited by Pierquin's experience.

The notary reckoned up the time and trouble expended, and regarded it as an excellent investment; he was putting them out to interest, as it were, and, with such a prospect before him, he had no mind to grudge the outlay.

In the first place, he endeavored to spare Marguerite the trouble of clearing the land and getting it ready for cultivation. He found three sons of wealthy farmers, young men who were anxious to settle themselves; to them he pointed out the attractive possibilities offered by such a fertile soil, and succeeded in letting the land to them just as it was, on a long lease. For the first three years they were to pay no rent at all, in the fourth they undertook to pay six thousand francs, twelve thousand in the sixth, and after that, fifteen thousand francs yearly till the expiration of the lease. They also undertook to drain the land, to make plantations, and purchase cattle. While the steadings were in course of erection they began to clear the ground.

Four years after Balthazar's departure, Marguerite had almost retrieved the fortunes of her brother and sister. Two hundred thousand francs, loaned by Emmanuel de Solis, had covered the expenses of the farm buildings. Advice and more substantial help had been readily given to the brave girl, for every one admired Marguerite's courage. She personally superintended the building operations, and looked after her contracts and leases with the good sense, energy, and perseverance which a woman can display when she is sustained by strong feeling.

After the fifth year Marguerite could devote thirty thousand francs of her income to paying off the mortgages on her father's property, and to repairing the havoc wrought by Balthazar's passion in the old house. Besides the rent from their own farms, they had the interest on the capital invested in her brother's name, and the proceeds of her father's property. The process of extinction of the debt was bound to be more and more rapid as the amount of interest decreased. Emmanuel de Solis, moreover, had persuaded Marguerite to take the remaining hundred thousand francs of his uncle's bequest, as well as some twenty thousand francs which he himself had saved, so that in the third year of her administration she could pay off a fairly large amount of debt. This life of courage, self-denial, and self-sacrifice lasted for five years, but it ended at last, thanks to Marguerite's influence and supervision, in complete success.

Gabriel had become a civil engineer, and with his great-uncle's help had made a rapid fortune by the construction of a canal. He found favor in the eyes of his cousin, Mlle. Conyncks, whom her father idolized, one of the richest heiresses in all Flanders. In 1824 Claes' property was free, and the house in the Rue de Paris had repaired its losses. Pierquin made formal application to Balthazar for Félicie's hand, and M. de Solis asked for Marguerite.

At the beginning of the month of January, 1825, Mar-

guerite and M. Conyncks set out for Brittany to bring back the exiled father, whom every one longed to see in his home again. He had resigned his post that he might spend the rest of his days among his children, and his presence should sanction their happiness. Marguerite had often bewailed the empty spaces on the walls of the picture-gallery and the state apartments, which must meet their father's eyes on his return, so that while she was away Pierquin and M. de Solis plotted with Félicie to prepare a surprise for her; the younger sister should also have a share in the restoration of the Maison Claes. Both gentlemen had bought several fine pictures, which they presented to Félicie, so that the gallery might be adorned as of old. The same thought had occurred to M. Conyncks, who wished to show his appreciation of Marguerite's noble conduct, and of the way in which she had devoted herself to fulfilling her dying mother's request. He arranged that fifty of his finest pictures, together with some of those that Balthazar had previously sold, should be sent to fill the picture gallery, where there were now no more blank spaces.

Marguerite had visited her father several times, Jean or her sister accompanying her on each journey; but, since her last visit, old age seemed to have gained on Balthazar. He lived extremely penuriously, for nearly all his income was spent on the experiment which brought nothing but disappointment, and probably the alarming symptoms were due to his manner of life. He was only sixty-five years of age, but he looked like a man of eighty. His eyes were deeply sunk in his face, his eyebrows were white, his hair hung in a scanty fringe round his head, he allowed his beard to grow, cutting it with a pair of scissors when its length annoyed him, he stooped like an old vine-dresser, his neglected dress suggested a degree of wretchedness that was frightful when combined with his look of decrepitude. Sometimes his face looked noble still when a great thought lighted it up, but the outlines of his features were obliterated by wrinkles; his fixed gaze, the des-

perate look in his eyes, and his restless uneasiness seemed to be symptoms of insanity, or rather of many forms of insanity. A sudden gleam of hope would give him the look of a monomaniac; an excess of impatience, that he could not guess this secret which flitted before him and eluded his grasp like a will-o'-the-wisp, would blaze out into impotent anger like madness, to be followed by a burst of laughter at his own folly; but, as a rule, he lived in a state of the deepest dejection, and every phase of frenzy was merged in the dull melancholy of the idiot. However fleeting and imperceptible these changes of expression might be for strangers, they were unhappily only too obvious for those who had known the once noble face, the Claes of former years, so sublime in goodness and so great-hearted, of whom scarcely a trace could now be recognized.

Le Mulquinier, like his master, was old and worn by incessant toil, but he had not borne the same burden, nor endured the constant strain of thought; a curious mixture of anxiety and admiration in the way in which he looked at his master might easily have misled a casual observer; he listened respectfully to Claes' slightest word, and watched his movements with a kind of tenderness; he looked after his great and learned master with a care like a mother's; he even seemed to protect him, and, in some ways, actually did protect him, for Balthazar never took any thought for the needs of physical existence. It was touching and painful to see the two old men, both wrapped in the same thought, both so sure of the reality of their hope, inspired by the same restless longing; it was as if they had but one life between them —the one was the soul, and the other the body. When Marguerite and M. Conyncks arrived they found M. Claes living in an inn; his successor had taken his place at once.

Through all the preoccupation of science, Balthazar had felt stirrings of the desire to see his country, his home, and children once more; his daughter's letter had brought good news; he had begun to dream of a crowning series of experi-

ments, which should surely yield at last the secret of the Absolute, and he awaited Marguerite's coming with great impatience.

The young girl shed tears of joy as she flung herself into his arms. This time she had come to receive her reward, the reward of a painful and difficult task, and to ask pardon for her brilliant success in it. But as she looked more closely at her father, she was shocked at the changes wrought in him since the previous visit; she felt as if she had committed a crime, like some great man who violates the liberties of his country to save its national existence. M. Conyncks shared his niece's misgivings; he insisted that his cousin must be moved at once, that the air of his native Douai might restore him to health, as the life by his own hearth should restore his reason.

After the first outpourings of affection, which were much warmer on Balthazar's part than Marguerite had expected, he was strangely attentive to her wishes; he expressed his regret at receiving her in such a poor place; he consulted her tastes in the ordering of their meals, and was as sedulously watchful as a lover. But in his manner also there was something of the uneasiness and anxiety of the culprit who wishes to secure a favorable hearing from a judge. Marguerite knew her father so well that she guessed the motives underlying this affectionate solicitude; she thought that he must have incurred debts in the town, which he was anxious to pay before he went. She watched her father narrowly for a while, and a human heart was laid bare to her gaze. Balthazar seemed to have grown little. The consciousness of his humiliation, the enforced isolation resulting from his scientific pursuits, had made him shy and almost like a child, save when the subject under discussion was connected with his beloved science. He stood in awe of his oldest daughter; he remembered her devotion in the past, the power of mind and character that she had shown, the authority with which he himself had invested her, the

fortune which she had administered so ably; and the indefinable feeling of dread which had taken possession of him on the day when he resigned the authority which he had abused had no doubt grown stronger with time.

Conyncks seemed to be as nothing in Balthazar's eyes; he saw no one but his daughter, and thought of no one else; he even seemed to dread her, as a weak-minded man is overawed by the wife whose will is stronger than his own. Marguerite's heart smote her when she detected a look of terror in his eyes, an expression like that of some little child who has been doing wrong. The noble girl could not understand the contradiction between the magnificent stern outlines of the head, the features worn by scientific labors and strenuous thought, and the weak smile on Balthazar's lips, the expression of artless servility in his face. This sharp contrast between greatness and littleness was very painful to her; she resolved to use her influence to restore her father's self-respect before the great day which was to restore him to his family. When they were left together for a moment, she began at once, seizing the opportunity to say in his ear—

"Have you any debts here, father?"

Balthazar reddened uneasily, and answered, "I do not know, but Le Mulquinier will tell you; he is a good fellow, and knows more about my affairs than I do myself."

Marguerite rang for the servant, and when he came she could not help studying the faces of the two old men.

"Is something wanted, monsieur?" asked Le Mulquinier.

Personal pride and family pride were two of Marguerite's strongest instincts; something in the servant's tone and manner told of an unseemly familiarity between her father and the companion of his labors which gave her a pang.

"It seems that my father is unable to reckon up what he owes here without your memory to aid him, Le Mulquinier," said Marguerite.

"Monsieur owes," Le Mulquinier began, but checked him-

self at a sign from Balthazar, which did not escape Marguerite. She felt surprised and humiliated.

"Tell me exactly how much my father owes," she exclaimed.

"Monsieur owes five thousand francs here in the town to a druggist and wholesale grocer who has supplied us with caustic potash, lead and zinc, and reagents."

"Is that all?" asked Marguerite.

Balthazar made an affirmative sign to Le Mulquinier, who answered like a man under a spell, "Yes, mademoiselle."

"Very well," she said, "I will give you the money."

Balthazar kissed his daughter in his joy. "You are my guardian angel, my child," he said.

He breathed more freely after that. There was less sadness in his eyes as he looked at her; but, in spite of his joy, Marguerite could see that in the depths of his heart he was still troubled, and she guessed that the five thousand francs merely represented the most pressing of the debts contracted for the expenses of the laboratory.

"Be frank with me, father," she said, as she let him draw her towards him, and sat on his knees, "do you owe more than this? Tell me everything; come back to your home without any lurking fear in your mind in the midst of the rejoicing."

"My dear Marguerite," he answered, taking her hands and kissing them with a grace that seemed like a memory of his youth, "shall you scold me?"

"No," she said.

"Really?" he asked, with an involuntary start of childish joy. "Can I really tell you everything? and will you pay ——"

"Yes," she said, trying to keep back the tears that came to her eyes.

"Very well, then, I owe. Oh! I dare not!"

"Father, do tell me!"

"But it is a great deal," he went on.

She clasped her hands in despair.

"I owe thirty thousand francs to MM. Protez and Chiffreville."

"Thirty thousand francs—all my savings," she said; "but I am glad that I can give them to you," she added, with a reverent kiss on his forehead.

He sprang to his feet, caught his daughter in his arms, and spun round the room with her, lifting her off her feet as though she had been a child; then he set her down in the armchair where she had been sitting, exclaiming, "My dear child, my treasure of love! There was no life left in me. Protez and Chiffreville have written three times; they threaten proceedings—proceedings against *me*, when I have made their fortunes——"

"Then you are still trying to find the solution of your problem, father?" said Marguerite sadly.

"Yes, still," he said, with a frenzied smile, "and I shall find it, never fear!——If you only knew where we are!"

"*We*, who?"

"I mean Mulquinier; he understands me at last; he is a great help to me——Poor fellow, he is so faithful!"

Conyncks came in at that moment and put an end to their conversation. Marguerite made a sign to her father to say no more; she dreaded lest he should lower himself in their uncle's eyes.

It shocked her to see the havoc wrought in that great intellect by incessant preoccupation with a problem perhaps after all insoluble. Balthazar, doubtless, could see nothing beyond his crucibles and furnaces; it never even crossed his mind that his affairs were no longer embarrassed.

They set out for Flanders next day; the journey was a sufficiently long one, and Marguerite had time to see many things on the way that threw gleams of light on the relative positions of Le Mulquinier and his master. Had the servant

gained the ascendancy, which uneducated minds can acquire over the greatest thinkers if they feel that they are indispensable to their betters? Such natures use concession after concession as stepping-stones to complete dominion, and attain their end at last by dint of dogged persistence. Or, on the other hand, was it the master who had come to feel for the servant the sort of affection that springs from use and wont, not unlike the fondness which a craftsman feels for his tool which executes his will, or the Arab for the horse to which he owes his freedom? Little things that passed under Marguerite's watchful eyes decided her to put this affection to the test, by proposing to free Balthazar from what perhaps was a galling yoke.

They spent a few days in Paris on their way back. Marguerite paid her father's debts, and besought the firm of chemists to send nothing to Douai without first giving her notice of Claes' orders. She persuaded her father to make some changes in his costume, and to dress as became a man of his rank. This external transformation gave Balthazar a sort of physical dignity, which augured well for a change in his ideas. Marguerite already felt something of the happiness which she looked for when her father should find the surprises that awaited him in his own house; and their departure for Douai was not long delayed.

Félicie, accompanied by her two brothers, Emmanuel, Pierquin, and the most intimate friends of the three families, rode out three leagues from the town to meet Balthazar. The long journey had given other directions to the chemist's thoughts, the sight of the Flemish landscape had stirred his heart, so that at the sight of the joyous cortège of children and friends he felt so deeply touched that tears filled his eyes, his voice shook, and his eyelids reddened; he took his children in his arms, and seemed as if he could not let them go, showing such passionate affection for them that the onlookers were moved to tears.

He turned pale when he saw his house once more, and sprang out of the carriage with the quickness of a young man; it seemed to be a pleasure to him to breathe the air in the courtyard once more, to see every trifling detail again; his happiness was plainly visible in every gesture that he made; he held himself erect, his face grew young again.

Tears came to his eyes as he stood in the doorway of the parlor, and saw how accurately his daughter had reproduced the old-fashioned silver sconces which he had sold, and how completely every trace of their misfortunes had disappeared. A magnificent breakfast awaited them in the dining-room; the shelves above the sideboards had been filled with curiosities and silver-plate at least as valuable as the heirlooms which formerly had stood there. Long as the family breakfast lasted, Balthazar scarcely heard all that he wished to hear from each of his children. His return had brought about a sort of reaction in him; he thought of nothing but family happiness; he was a father before all things. There was the old courtliness in his manner. In the joy of that first moment of possession he did not ask by what means all that he had squandered had been recovered, and his happiness was complete and entire.

Breakfast over, the father and his four children, and Pierquin the notary, went into the parlor, and Balthazar saw, not without uneasiness, the stamped papers which a clerk had arranged on the table by which he stood, as if awaiting further instructions from his employer. Balthazar stood in amazement before the hearth as his family seated themselves.

"This," said Pierquin, "is an account of his guardianship rendered by M. Claes to his children. It is not very amusing, of course," he added, laughing, after the manner of notaries, who are wont to adopt a jesting tone over the gravest matters of business, "but it is absolutely necessary that you should hear it read."

Although the circumstances of the case might justify the

use of this phrase, M. Claes, with an uneasy conscience, must needs think it a reproach, and he frowned. The clerk began to read; the farther he read, the greater grew Balthazar's astonishment. In the first place, it was ascertained that at the time of his wife's death her fortune had amounted to about sixteen hundred thousand francs, and at the conclusion of the statement of accounts each child's share was paid in full, everything was clear and straightforward, as if the most prudent father of a family had administered the estate. It was shown incidentally that Gabriel's mortgage on the house had been paid off, that Balthazar's dwelling was his own, and that his estates were free from all liabilities. He had recovered his honor as a man, his position as a citizen, his existence as a father all at once; he sank into an armchair and looked round for Marguerite, but, with a woman's exquisite delicacy of feeling, she had stolen away during the reading, to make sure that all her arrangements for the fête had been fully carried out. Every one of Claes' children understood what was passing in his mind when through a film of tears his eyes sought for his daughter; she seemed to their inner vision like a strong, bright angel. Gabriel went to find Marguerite, Balthazar heard her footstep, hurried towards her, met her at the foot of the staircase, and clasped her in his arms.

"Father," she said, as the old man held her tightly, "do nothing, I implore you, to lessen your sacred authority. You must thank me, before them all, for carrying out your wishes so well; *you*, and you alone, must be the author of the changes for the better which may have been effected here."

Balthazar raised his eyes to heaven, looked at his daughter and folded his arms; his face wore a look which none of his children had seen for ten years, as he said, "Why are you not here, Pepita, to admire our child?"

He could say no more. He held his daughter in a tight embrace for a moment, and went back to the parlor.

"Children," he said, with the noble bearing which had so

pre-eminently distinguished him in former years, "we all owe a debt of thanks and gratitude to my daughter Marguerite for the courage and prudence with which she has carried out my plans, while I, too much absorbed by scientific research, left the administration of our affairs and the reins of authority in her hands."

"Ah! now we will read the marriage contracts," said Pierquin, glancing at the clock. "But I have nothing to do with that, inasmuch as the law forbids me to draw up documents for myself and my relations; so M. Raparlier's uncle is coming."

The friends who had been invited to the dinner given to celebrate M. Claes' return and the signing of the contracts now began to arrive, and the servants brought the wedding presents. The assemblage, which rapidly grew, was brilliant by reason of the rank of the visitors and the splendor of their toilet. The three families thus brought together to witness their children's happiness had striven to outshine each other. The parlor was filled almost at once with splendid gifts for the betrothed couples. Gold flowed in on them and sparkled there, stuffs lay unfolded, cashmere shawls lay among necklaces and jewels. Givers and receivers alike felt heartfelt joy; an almost childish delight shone visibly in all faces, so that the magnificence and costliness of the gifts were forgotten by those less nearly concerned, who, as a rule, are sufficiently ready to amuse themselves by counting up the cost.

The ceremony soon began. After the manner traditional in the family of Claes, the parents alone were seated; every one else who was present remained standing about them at a little distance. On the side of the parlor nearest the garden stood Gabriel Claes and Mlle. Conyncks, next to them M. de Solis and Marguerite, her sister Félicie and Pierquin. Balthazar and M. Conyncks (the only two who were seated) took up their position on either side of the notary who had succeeded Pierquin. Jean stood behind his father's armchair;

and on the opposite side of the room, nearest the courtyard, stood an imposing circle, composed of a score of well-dressed women and several men, near relations of Pierquin, Conyncks, or of the Claes, the mayor of Douai, before whom the marriages were to take place, and a dozen of the most devoted friends of the three families, including the first president of the Court-Royal of Douai and the curé of St. Pierre. The homage paid by such an assemblage to the fathers, who seemed for a moment to be invested with regal dignity, gave an almost patriarchal color to the scene. For the first time, during sixteen years, Balthazar forgot the Quest of the Absolute for a moment.

All the persons who had been invited to the signing of the contract and to the dinner were now present. M. Raparlier, having ascertained this from Marguerite and her sister, had returned to his place and taken up the contract of marriage between Marguerite and Emmanuel de Solis, which was to be read first, when the door suddenly flew open, and Le Mulquinier's face appeared beaming with joy and excitement.

"Monsieur! monsieur!" he called.

Balthazar gave Marguerite a despairing glance, beckoned to her, and they went out into the garden together. A presentiment of impending trouble fell on those assembled.

"I did not dare to tell you, dear child," the father said to his daughter, "but you have done so much for me that you will surely help me out of this new trouble. Le Mulquinier loaned me his savings for my last experiment, which was unsuccessful; he loaned me twenty thousand francs, and doubtless the wretched fellow has found out that I am rich again, and wants to have his money; let him have it at once. Oh! my angel, you owe your father's life to him, for he was my sole support and comfort through all my failures; he alone still had faith in me. Without him I must have died——"

"Monsieur, monsieur!" cried Le Mulquinier.

"Well?" said Balthazar, turning towards him.

"A diamond!"

At the sight of the diamond in the old servant's hand, Claes rushed to the parlor. Le Mulquinier began in a whisper—

"I went up to the laboratory——"

The chemist, completely forgetful of his surroundings, gave the old Fleming a look which can only be rendered by the words—

"*You were the first to go up to the laboratory!*"

"And I found this diamond there," the servant went on, "in the capsule which communicated with that battery which we left to its own devices—and it has done the trick, sir!" he added, holding up a white diamond of octahedral form, so brilliant that the eyes of all those assembled were attracted by it.

"My children and friends," said Balthazar, "forgive my old servant, forgive me. This will drive me mad! At some time during the past seven years chance has brought about in my laboratory this result that I have sought in vain to compass for sixteen years—and I was not there! How has it come about? I have no idea. Oh, yes; I know that I submitted a combination of sulphur and carbon to the influence of a voltaic battery, but the process should have been watched from day to day. And now, during my absence, the power of God has been manifested in my laboratory, and I have been unable to watch its workings, for this has been brought about gradually, of course! It is overwhelming, is it not? Accursed exile! accursed fatality! Ah! if only I had watched this long, this slow, this sudden—I know not what to call it—crystallization, transformation, *miracle*, in fact, my children would be—well, richer still. Perhaps the problem would still remain to be solved, but at least the first rays of the dawn of my glory would have shone upon my country; and this moment, when

the longings of affection are satisfied, though it glows with our happiness, would have been gladdened yet more by the sunlight of science."

Every one kept silence; the disconnected phrases wrung from him by agony were too sincere not to be sublime. All at once Balthazar recovered himself, forced back his despair into some inner depths, and gave the assembly a majestic glance. Other souls caught something of his enthusiasm. He took the sparkling diamond and held it out to Marguerite, saying—

"It belongs to you, my angel."

He dismissed Le Mulquinier by a sign, and spoke to the notary—

"Let us go on," he said.

The words produced a sensation among those who heard them, a responsive thrill such as Talma, in some of his parts, could awaken in a vast listening audience that hung on his words. Balthazar sat down, saying to himself, "To-day I must be a father only." He spoke in a low voice; but Marguerite, who overheard him, went over to her father and reverently kissed his hand.

"Never was there a man so great!" said Emmanuel, when his betrothed returned to his side; "never was there so strong a will; any other would have gone mad."

As soon as the three contracts had been read and signed, every one crowded about Balthazar to ask how the diamond had been made, but he could throw no light on the mysterious event. He looked out at the attic, and pointed to it in a kind of frenzy.

"Yes, the awful power which results from the vibrations of glowing matter, which doubtless produces metals and diamonds, manifested itself there," he said, "for one moment—by chance."

"A chance that came about quite naturally," said one of those people who like to account for everything; "the old

gentleman left a real diamond lying about. It is so much saved out of all that he has burned up."

"Let us forget this," said Balthazar to the friends who stood about him; "I beg you will not speak of it again to me to-day."

Marguerite took her father's arm to lead him to the state apartments, where a banquet had been prepared. As he followed his guests along the gallery, he saw that it was filled with rare flowers, and that the walls were covered with pictures.

"Pictures!" he cried, "pictures!—and some of the old ones!"

He stopped; for a moment he looked gloomy and sad; he knew by the extent of his own humiliation how great had been the wrong that he had done his children.

"All this is yours, father," said Marguerite, guessing Balthazar's trouble.

"Angel, over whom the angels in heaven must surely rejoice," he cried, "how many times you have given life to your father."

"Let there be no cloud on your brow, and not the least sad thought left in your heart," she answered, "and you will have rewarded me beyond my hopes. I have just been thinking about Le Mulquinier, dearest father; little things you have said of him now and then have made me esteem him, and I confess I have been unjust to him; he ought to live here as a humble friend of yours. Never mind about your debt to him; Emmanuel has saved nearly sixty thousand francs, and Le Mulquinier shall have the money. After he has served you so faithfully, he ought to spend the rest of his days in comfort. And do not be troubled on our account. M. de Solis and I mean to live simply and quietly—without luxury; we can spare the money until you are able to return it."

"Oh, my child! you must never leave me! you must always be your father's providence!"

When she reached the state apartments, Balthazar saw that they had been restored and furnished as splendidly as before. The guests presently went down to the dining-room on the ground floor, flowering shrubs stood on every step of the great staircase. A service of silver-plate of marvelous workmanship, Gabriel's gift to his father, attracted all eyes by its splendor; it was a surprise even to the proudest burghers of Douai, who are accustomed to a lavish display of silver. The guests were waited upon by the servants of the three households of Claes, Conyncks, and Pierquin; Le Mulquinier stood behind his master's chair. Balthazar, in the midst of his kinsfolk at the head of the table, read heartfelt joy in the happy faces that encircled it, and felt so deeply moved that every one was silent, as men are silent in the presence of a great joy or sorrow.

"Dear children!" he said, "you have killed the fatted calf for the return of the prodigal father."

The phrase in which the chemist summed up his position, and which perhaps anticipated harsher criticism, was spoken so generously that every one present was moved to tears; but with the tears the last trace of sadness vanished, and happiness found its expression in the blithe merriment characteristic of family festivals. After the dinner the principal families of Douai began to arrive for the ball, and in its restoration the Maison Claes more than equaled its traditional splendor.

The three weddings shortly followed; the ensuing rejoicings, balls, and banquets drew Claes into the vortex of social life for several months. His oldest son went to live near Cambrai on an estate belonging to his father-in-law, for M. Conyncks could not bear to be separated from his daughter. Mme. Pierquin likewise left her father's roof to preside over a mansion which Pierquin had built, where he meant to live in all the dignity befitting his rank, for he had sold his practice, and his uncle des Racquets had recently died and left him all the wealth which he had slowly amassed. Jean went

to Paris to finish his education; so of all his children, only M. and Mme. de Solis remained with Balthazar in the old house. He had given up the family home in the rear to them, and lived himself on the second story of the front building. So Marguerite still watched over Balthazar's comfort, and Emmanuel helped her in the congenial task.

The noble girl received from the hands of love the crown most eagerly desired of all—the wreath that is woven by happiness and kept fresh by constancy. Indeed, no more perfect picture of the pure, complete, and acknowledged happiness, of which all women fondly dream, could be found. The unity of heart between two beings who had faced the trials of life so bravely, and who felt for each other such a sacred affection, called forth the admiration and respect of those who knew them.

M. de Solis, who for some time had held an appointment as inspector-general of the university, resigned his post to enjoy his happiness at his leisure, and remained in Douai, where his character and talents were held in such high esteem that his election as a deputy when the time came was already spoken of as certain.

Marguerite, who had been so strong in adversity, became a sweet and tender woman in prosperity. Through the rest of that year Claes was certainly deeply absorbed in his studies; but though he made a few experiments, involving but little expense, his ordinary income was sufficient for his requirements, and he seemed to neglect his laboratory work. Marguerite had adopted the old tradition of the house, gave a family dinner every month, to which her father, the Pierquins, and the Conyncks came, and received her own circle of acquaintances one day in the week. Her *cafés* had a great vogue. Claes was usually present on these occasions, though he sometimes seemed to be scarcely conscious of his surroundings, but he went into society again so cheerfully to please his daughter that his children might well imagine that he had

given up the attempt to solve his problem. In this way three years went by.

In 1828 a piece of good fortune which befell Emmanuel took him to Spain. Although three numerous families, branches of the house of Solis, stood between him and the family estates, yellow fever, old age, and various freaks of fortune combined to leave them all childless, and the titles and entail passed to Emmanuel, who was the last of his family. By one of those chances which seem less improbable in real life than in books, the lands and titles of the Counts of Nourho had been acquired by the house of Solis. Marguerite would not be separated from her husband, who would be forced to stay long enough in Spain to settle his affairs; moreover, she looked forward to seeing the château of Casa-Real, where her mother had passed her childhood, and the city of Granada, the cradle of the de Solis family. So she went with her husband, leaving the household to Martha, Josette, and Le Mulquinier, who were accustomed to its management. Marguerite had proposed to Balthazar that he should go with them, and he had declined on the score of his great age; but the fact was that he had long meditated certain experiments, which should realize his hopes at last, and this was the true reason of his refusal.

The Comte and Comtesse de Solis y Nourho stayed longer in Spain than they had intended, and a child was born to them there. It was not until the middle of the year 1830 that they reached Cadiz, intending to return to France by way of Italy; but at Cadiz a letter came from Félicie bringing evil tidings. In eighteen months their father had completely ruined himself. Gabriel and Pierquin were obliged to allow him a fixed sum every month to pay for necessary expenses, and the money was paid to Le Mulquinier. The old servant had sacrificed his savings a second time to his master. Balthazar saw no one, not even his own children were admitted into the house. Josette and Martha were both dead; the

coachman, the cook, and the rest of the servants had been dismissed one after another, and the horses and carriages had been sold. Although Le Mulquinier was discreet and taciturn, there was too good ground for believing that the money which Gabriel Claes and Pierquin allowed him for necessaries was spent on his experiments. Indeed, Gabriel and Pierquin were paying the interest of a mortgage on the Maison Claes, effected without their knowledge, lest the house should be sold above his head. None of his children had any influence with the old man of seventy, who still possessed such extraordinary energy and determination even in trifles. It was just possible that Marguerite might regain her old ascendancy over him, and Félicie begged her sister to come home at once; she was in terror lest her father should have put his name to bills once more. Gabriel, Conyncks, and Pierquin had taken alarm at this persistent madness which had spent seven millions of francs without result, and had decided not to pay M. Claes' debts. This letter changed Marguerite's traveling plans; she took the shortest way home to Douai. With her past savings and newly acquired wealth it would be easy to pay her father's debts once more; but she determined to do more than this, she would fulfill her mother's wishes; Balthazar Claes should not sink into a dishonored grave. Clearly she alone had sufficient influence with him to prevent him from carrying out his ruinous career to its natural end, at a time of life when great results could scarcely be expected from his enfeebled powers; but she wished to persuade him, and not to wound his susceptibilities, fearing to imitate the children of Sophocles; possibly her father, after all, was nearing the solution of the scientific problem to which he had sacrificed so much.

M. and Mme. de Solis reached Flanders in 1831, and arrived in Douai one morning towards the end of September. Marguerite ordered the coachman to drive to her house in the Rue de Paris, and found it shut up; a violent ring at the door bell produced no answer. A shopkeeper,

who lived opposite, left his doorstep, whither he had been brought by the noise of the carriages; many of the neighbors were at their windows, partly because they were glad to see the return of a family so much beloved in the town, partly stirred by a vague feeling of curiosity as to what might happen when Marguerite came back to the Maison Claes. The shopkeeper told the Comte de Solis' man that old M. Claes had left the house about an hour before. Le Mulquinier had doubtless taken him to walk upon the ramparts.

Marguerite sent for a locksmith to force open the door, so as to avoid a scene with her father, if (as Félicie's letter had led her to expect) he should refuse to allow her to enter the house. Emmanuel himself, meanwhile, went in search of the old man to bring him the news of his daughter's arrival, and dispatched his man with a message to M. and Mme. Pierquin.

It did not take long to force open the door. Marguerite went to the parlor to give directions about their baggage. A shiver of horror went through her as she entered—the walls were as bare as if a fire had swept over them. Van Huysium's wonderful carvings and the portrait of the great Claes had been sold to Lord Spencer, so some one said. The dining-room was empty; there was nothing there but two straw-bottomed chairs, and a wretched table, on which Marguerite saw, with dreadful misgivings, a couple of bowls and plates, two silver spoons and forks, and, on a dish, the remains of a herring, the meal, doubtless, of which Claes and his servant had just partaken. As she hurried through the state apartments, she saw that every room was as bare and forlorn as the parlor and the dining-room; the idea of the Absolute seemed to have passed through the whole house like a fire.

For all furniture in her father's room, there was a bed, a chair, and a table; a tallow candle burned down to the socket stood in a battered copper candlestick. The house had been stripped so completely that there were no curtains in the windows; everything that could bring in a few pence,

even the kitchen utensils, had been sold. Drawn by the feeling of curiosity that survives in us even in the deepest misfortune, Marguerite looked into Le Mulquinier's room; it was as bare and empty as his master's. The drawer in the table stood half-open, and Marguerite caught a glimpse of a pawn-ticket; the servant had pledged his watch a few days previously. She hastened to the attic; the laboratory was as well replenished as it used to be; finally, she had the door of her own room forced open; everything was as she had left it, her father had respected her apartment.

Marguerite glanced round her, burst into tears, and in her heart forgave her father. Even in the frenzy of enthusiasm, which spared nothing else, he had been checked by fatherly love and a feeling of gratitude towards her. This proof of tenderness, received in the depths of her despair, wrought in Marguerite one of those revulsions which prove too strong for the coldest hearts. She went down to the parlor, and waited for her father's coming, with an anxiety which was increased by horrible fears; she was about to see him, would he be changed? Should she see a decrepit, ailing wreck, emaciated by fastings endured through pride? Suppose his reason had failed? Her tears flowed fast in the profaned sanctuary. Scenes of her past life rose up before her. She remembered her struggles, her vain attempts to save her father from himself, her childish days, the mother who had been so happy and so unhappy; everything about her, even the face of her little Joseph who smiled on the desolation, seemed to form part of some unreal, mournful tragedy.

But for all her sad forebodings, she did not foresee the catastrophe of the drama of her father's life, a life so magnificent and so wretched. Claes' affairs were no secret. To the shame of humanity, there were no generous natures to be found in Douai who could reverence the passionate persistence of the man of genius. Balthazar was put under the ban of society; he was a bad father, who had run through half-a-

dozen fortunes, who had spent millions of francs on the search of the philosopher's stone in this enlightened nineteenth century, the century of incredulity, etc.——He was maligned and calumniated; he was branded with the contemptuous epithet of "The alchemist." "He wants to make gold!" They scoffed, and cast it in his teeth.

Has this much-lauded century of ours shown itself so different from all other centuries? It has left genius to die with the brutal indifference of past ages that beheld the deaths of Dante, Cervantes, Tasso, *e tutti quanti;* and ordinary mortals recognize the work of genius even more slowly than kings.

So these opinions concerning Claes had gradually filtered downwards from the aristocratic section to the bourgeoisie, and from the bourgeoisie to the masses. Profound compassion was felt for the aged chemist by people of his own rank, and the populace looked on him with a sort of amused curiosity; both ways of regarding him implied the scornful *Vae victis* with which the crowd closes over fallen greatness.

People, as they went past the house, used to point out the rose-window of the attic where so much gold and coal had been wasted. When Balthazar went along the street, they pointed the finger at him; his appearance was often the signal for a joke or a pitying word from the children or workpeople; but Le Mulquinier, ever on the watch, translated the whisperings into a murmur of admiration for his master, who never suspected the real truth.

Balthazar's eyes still preserved the wonderful clearness which an inward vision of great ideas had given to them, but he had grown deaf. For the peasants, and for vulgar or superstitious minds, the old man was a wizard. The old and splendid home of the Claes was spoken of in narrow streets and country cottages as the "Devil's House;" nothing was lacking to give color to these absurd tales; even Le Mulquinier's appearance gave rise to some of the lying legends about his master. When, therefore, the poor, faithful, old servant

went out to buy their scanty supply of necessaries in the market, he not only paid higher prices than any one else for his meagre purchases, but he could buy nothing without receiving insults thrown in as a sort of make-weight; he even thought himself lucky if the superstitious market-women did not refuse to supply him with his miserable pittance of food, for it too often happened that they were afraid to endanger their souls by dealing with a tool of Satan.

The general feeling of the town was hostile to the old great man and the companion of his labors. They were not the better thought of because they were ill clad and wore the shabby clothing of decent poverty that shrinks from begging. Open insult was sure to be offered them sooner or later; and Pierquin, for the sake of his family, always took the precaution of sending two or three of his servants to follow the old men at a distance, and to interfere, if necessary, to protect them, for the influence of the Revolution of July had not improved the manners of the populace.

By some inexplicable chance Claes and Le Mulquinier had gone out early that morning, and M. and Mme. Pierquin's secret vigilance was for once at fault; the two old men were out alone in the town. On their way home they sat down to rest in the Place Saint-Jacques, on a bench in the sun. Boys and children were continually passing by on their way to school, and when they looked across the square and saw the two helpless old men, whose faces brightened as they basked in the sunlight, the children made little groups, and began to talk. Children's chatter usually ends in laughter, and laughter leads to mischief, which has no cruel intention. Seven or eight of the first-comers stood at a little distance and stared at the strange old faces; Le Mulquinier heard their smothered laughter.

"There," cried one, "do you see that one with the forehead like a knee?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, he is a born wise man."

"Papa says he makes gold," put in another.

"Gold? What way does he make it?" asked a third, with a contemptuous gesture.

The smallest of the children, who carried a basket full of provisions, and was munching a slice of bread and butter, went artlessly up to the bench, and said to Le Mulquinier—

"Is it true that you make pearls and diamonds, sir?"

"Yes, little man," said Le Mulquinier, smiling, and patting his cheeks, "learn your lessons, and grow very wise, and we will give you some."

"Oh, sir! give me some too!" was the general cry.

All the children scampered up and crowded about the two chemists like a flock of birds; their cries roused Balthazar from his musings; he gave a start that made them laugh.

"Ah! you little rascals, respect a great man!" said Le Mulquinier.

"A harlequin!" shouted the children; "you are sorcerers!——yes, sorcerers! old sorcerers! *sorcerers*, ah!"

Le Mulquinier sprang to his feet, raised his cane, and threatened the children, who promptly fled, and picked up stones and mud. A workman who was eating his breakfast not far away looked up and saw Le Mulquinier take his cane to drive the children away, thought that he had beaten them, and came to their aid with the formidable cry, "Down with the sorcerers!"

Thus encouraged, the children were pelting the two old men with stones as the Comte de Solis, followed by Pierquin's servants, came into the square. They were too late to stop the shower of mud with which the children bespattered the great man and his servant; the mischief was done. Balthazar had hitherto preserved the full force of his faculties by the monastic habits and temperate life of a man of science, in whom one all-absorbing passion had extinguished all others. In the course of his ruminations the meaning of this scene

suddenly dawned on him. The sudden revulsion of feeling, the contrast between the ideal world in which he lived and the real world about him, was too great a shock; he fell into Le Mulquinier's arms, struck down by paralysis. He was carried home on a stretcher, his two sons-in-law and the servants going with him. Nothing could prevent the crowd that gathered from following the old man to his house. Félicie and her children were there already, and Gabriel and his wife had come from Cambrai, hearing through their sister of Marguerite's return.

The old man's return to his house was piteous to see. Even as he lay between life and death his chief terror seemed to be the thought that his children would discover the wretchedness in which he had been living. As soon as a bed could be made up in the parlor, every care was bestowed on Balthazar, and towards the end of the day some hopes of his recovery were entertained. But in spite of all that skill could do, the paralysis had left him in an almost childish condition. After the other symptoms had abated, his speech was still affected, perhaps because anger had taken all power to speak from him when he attempted to remonstrate with the children.

General indignation was felt in the town when the news of the affair became known. Some mysterious law working in the minds of men had wrought a revulsion of feeling, and M. Claes regained his popularity. He suddenly became a great man. All the admiration and esteem which had been so long withdrawn was his again. Every one praised his patient toil, his courage, his strength of will, his genius. The magistrates were disposed to treat the small delinquents very harshly; but the evil was done, and Claes' own family were the first to ask that the affair should be smoothed over.

The parlor was refurnished by Marguerite's directions, silken hangings covered the bare walls where the carved panels once had been; and when, a few days after his seizure, Claes recovered the use of his faculties, he found himself among luxurious

surroundings; nothing that could contribute to his comfort had been forgotten. Marguerite came into the parlor just as he tried to say that surely she must have come back. A flush came over Balthazar's face at the sight of her; his eyes were full of tears that did not fall; he was still able to grasp his daughter's hand in his cold fingers, and in this pressure he put all the feelings and the thoughts that he could not utter. There was something very sacred and solemn in this farewell, from a dying brain and a heart to which gratitude had brought back some of the glow of the warmth of life.

Exhausted by all his fruitless labors, worn out by his wrestlings with a giant problem, seeing, perhaps, with despair in his heart, the oblivion that waited for his memory, the Titan neared the end of his life. Everything about him spoke of his children's reverent affection. There were signs of wealth and plenty, if these things could have rejoiced his eyes; the fair picture of their faces to gladden his heart. He could now only express his affection for them by looks, and his eyes were always full of tenderness; it was as if they had suddenly acquired a strange and varied power of speech, and the light that shone in them was a language easy to understand.

Marguerite paid her father's debts; and though the ancient glories of the house of Claes had departed, it was shortly refurnished with a magnificence that effaced all memories of its forlorn condition. She was never absent from Balthazar's bedside, and strove to guess his thoughts and to anticipate his slightest wish; never in action or word displaying aught but the tenderest affection for him.

Several months went by in alternations of hope and despair that mark the progress of the final struggle between life and death in an aged frame. His children came to see him every morning, and spent the day in his room; they dined there in the parlor by his bedside, and only left him while he slept. The newspapers seemed to be his principal resource; he took a great interest in the political events of the time, listening

attentively to M. de Solis, who read them aloud to him, and sat close beside him that he might hear every word.

One night towards the end of the year 1832 Balthazar's condition grew critical; the nurse, alarmed by a sudden change in the patient, sent for Dr. Pierquin, and when he came, he decided to remain; Claes' convulsions seemed so like the agony of death that the doctor feared any moment might be his last.

The old man was struggling against the paralysis that bound his limbs. He made incredible efforts to speak; his lips moved, but no sound came from them; his thoughts seemed to blaze from his eyes; his face was drawn with unheard-of anguish; great drops of perspiration broke out on his forehead; his fingers twitched nervously in his despair.

That morning when his children came and embraced him with the affection that grew more intense and more clinging with the near approach of death, he showed none of the happiness that he always felt in their tenderness.

Emmanuel, at a warning glance from Pierquin, hastily tore the newspaper from its wrapper, thinking that perhaps the reading might divert Balthazar's mind from his physical sufferings. As he unfolded the sheet the words DISCOVERY OF THE ABSOLUTE caught his eyes and startled him, and he read the paragraph to Marguerite under his breath. It told of a bargain concluded by a celebrated Polish mathematician for the secret of the Absolute, which he had discovered. At the conclusion of the paragraph Marguerite asked her husband for the paper, but, low as the tones of his voice had been, Balthazar had heard him.

Suddenly the dying man raised himself on his elbows; his glance seemed like lightning to his terror-stricken children, the hair that fringed his temples rose, every wrinkle in his face quivered with excitement, a breath of inspiration passed over his face and made it sublime. He raised a hand, clenched in frenzy, with the cry of Archimedes—EUREKA! (*I have*

found it!) he called in piercing tones, then he fell heavily back like a dead body, and died with an awful moan. His despair could be read in the frenzied expression of his eyes until the doctor closed them. He could not leave to science the solution of the great enigma revealed to him too late, as the veil was torn asunder by the fleshless fingers of Death.

THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE.

(*Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu.*)

To a Lord.

I. GILLETTE.

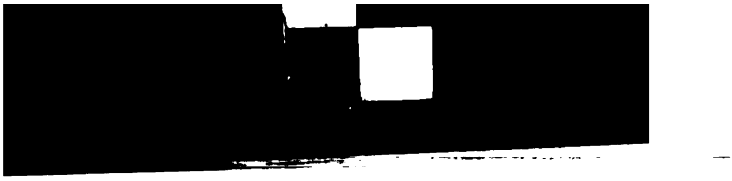
On a cold December morning in the year 1612, a young man, whose clothing was somewhat of the thinnest, was walking to and fro before a gateway in the Rue des Grands-Augustins in Paris. He went up and down the street before this house with the irresolution of a gallant who dares not venture into the presence of the woman whom he loves for the first time, easy of access though she may be; but after a sufficiently long interval of hesitation, he at last crossed the threshold and inquired of an old woman, who was sweeping out a large room on the ground floor, whether Master Porbus was within. Receiving a reply in the affirmative, the young man went slowly up the staircase, like a gentleman but newly come to court, and doubtful as to his reception by the king. He came to a stand once more on the landing at the head of the stairs, and again he hesitated before raising his hand to the grotesque knocker on the door of the studio, where doubtless the painter was at work—Master Porbus, sometime painter in ordinary to Henri IV. till Marie de Médicis took Rubens into favor.

The young man felt deeply stirred by an emotion that must thrill the hearts of all great artists when, in the pride of their youth and their first love of art, they come into the presence of a master or stand before a masterpiece. For all human sentiments there is a time of early blossoming, a day of generous enthusiasm that gradually fades until nothing is left of happi-

ness but a memory, and glory is known for a delusion. Of all these delicate and short-lived emotions, none so resemble love as the passion of a young artist for his art, as he is about to enter on the blissful martyrdom of his career of glory and disaster, of vague expectations and real disappointments.

Those who have missed this experience in the early days of light purses; who have not, in the dawn of their genius, stood in the presence of a master and felt the throbbing of their hearts, will always carry in their inmost souls a chord that has never been touched, and in their work an indefinable quality will be lacking, a something in the stroke of the brush, a mysterious element that we call poetry. The swaggerers, so puffed up by self-conceit that they are overly confident of their success, can never be taken for men of talent save by fools. From this point of view, if youthful modesty is the measure of youthful genius, the stranger on the staircase might be allowed to have something in him; for he seemed to possess the indescribable diffidence, the early timidity that artists are bound to lose in the course of a great career, even as pretty women lose it as they make progress in the arts of coquetry. Self-distrust vanishes as triumph succeeds to triumph, and modesty is, perhaps, distrust of self.

The poor neophyte was so overcome by the consciousness of his own presumption and insignificance, that it began to look as if he was hardly likely to penetrate into the studio of the painter, to whom we owe the wonderful portrait of Henri IV. But fate was propitious; an old man came up the staircase. From the quaint costume of this new-comer, his collar of magnificent lace, and a certain serene gravity in his bearing, the first arrival thought that this personage must be either a patron or a friend of the court painter. He stood aside therefore upon the landing to allow the visitor to pass, scrutinizing him curiously the while. Perhaps he might hope to find the good nature of an artist or to receive the good offices of an amateur not unfriendly to the arts; but besides an



NIV.
OF

THE OLDER MAN . . . . . KNOCKED THRICE AT THE DOOR.

almost diabolical expression in the face that met his gaze, there was that indescribable something which has an irresistible attraction for artists.

Picture that face. A bald high forehead and rugged jutting brows above a small flat nose turned up at the end, as in the portraits of Socrates and Rabelais; deep lines about the mocking mouth; a short chin, carried proudly, covered with a grizzled pointed beard; sea-green eyes that age might seem to have dimmed were it not for the contrast between the iris and the surrounding mother-of-pearl tints, so that it seemed as if under the stress of anger or enthusiasm there would be a magnetic power to quell or kindle in their glances. The face was withered beyond wont by the fatigue of years, yet it seemed aged still more by the thoughts that had worn away both soul and body. There were no lashes to the deep-set eyes, and scarcely a trace of the arching lines of the eyebrows above them. Set this head on a spare and feeble frame, place it in a frame of lace wrought like an engraved silver fish-slice, imagine a heavy gold chain over the old man's black doublet, and you will have some dim idea of this strange personage, who seemed still more fantastic in the sombre twilight of the staircase. One of Rembrandt's portraits might have stepped down from its frame to walk in an appropriate atmosphere of gloom, such as the great painter loved. The older man gave the younger a shrewd glance, and knocked thrice at the door. It was opened by a man of forty or thereabouts, who seemed to be an invalid.

"Good-day, master."

Probus bowed respectfully, and held the door open for the younger man to enter, thinking that the latter accompanied his visitor; and when he saw that the neophyte stood awhile as if spellbound, feeling, as every artist-nature must feel, the fascinating influence of the first sight of a studio in which the material processes of art are revealed, Probus troubled himself no more about this second comer.

All the light in the studio came from a window in the roof and was concentrated upon an easel, where a canvas stood untouched as yet save for three or four outlines in chalk. The daylight scarcely reached the remoter angles and corners of the vast room; they were as dark as night, but the silver ornamented breastplate of a Reiter's corslet, that hung upon the wall, attracted a stray gleam to its dim abiding-place among the brown shadows; or a shaft of light shot across the carved and glistening surface of an antique sideboard covered with curious silver-plate, or struck out a line of glittering dots among the raised threads of the golden warp of some old brocaded curtains, where the lines of the stiff heavy folds were broken, as the stuff had been flung carelessly down to serve as a model.

Plaster *écorchés* stood about the room; and here and there, on shelves and tables, lay fragments of classical sculpture—torsos of antique goddesses, worn smooth as though all the years of the centuries that had passed over them had been lovers' kisses. The walls were covered, from floor to ceiling, with countless sketches of charcoal, red chalk, or pen and ink. Amid the litter and confusion of color boxes, overturned stools, flasks of oil, and essences, there was just room to move so as to reach the illuminated circular space where the easel stood. The light from the window in the roof fell full upon Porbus' pale face and on the ivory-tinted forehead of his strange visitor. But in another moment the younger man heeded nothing but a picture that had already become famous even in those stormy days of political and religious revolutions, a picture that a few of the zealous worshipers, who have so often kept the sacred fire of art alive in evil days, were wont to go on pilgrimages to see. The beautiful panel represented a Saint Mary of Egypt about to pay her passage across the seas. It was a masterpiece destined for Marie de Médicis, who sold it in later years of poverty.

"I like your saint," the old man remarked, addressing

Porbus. "I would give you ten golden crowns for her over and above the price the Queen is paying; but as for putting a spoke in that wheel—the devil take it!"

"It is good then?"

"Hey! hey!" said the old man; "good, say you?—Yes and no. Your good woman is not badly done, but she is not alive. You artists fancy that when a figure is correctly drawn, and everything in its place according to the rules of anatomy, there is nothing more to be done. You make up the flesh tints beforehand on your palettes according to your formulæ, and fill in the outlines with due care that one side of the face shall be darker than the other; and because you look from time to time at a naked woman who stands on the platform before you, you fondly imagine that you have copied nature, think yourselves to be painters, believe that you have wrested His secret from God. Pshaw! You may know your syntax thoroughly and make no blunders in your grammar, but it takes that and something more to make a great poet. Look at your saint, Porbus! At a first glance, she is admirable; look at her again, and you see at once that she is glued to the background, and that you could not walk round her. She is a silhouette that turns but one side of her face to all beholders, a figure cut out of canvas, an image with no power to move nor change her position. I feel as if there were no air between that arm and the background, no space, no sense of distance in your canvas. The perspective is perfectly correct, the strength of the coloring is accurately diminished with the distance; but, in spite of these praiseworthy efforts, I could never bring myself to believe that the warm breath of life comes and goes in that beautiful body. It seems to me that if I laid my hand on the firm rounded throat, it would be cold as marble to the touch. No, my friend, the blood does not flow beneath that ivory skin, the tide of life does not flush those delicate fibres, the purple veins that trace a network beneath the transparent amber of

her brow and breast. Here the pulse seems to beat, there it is motionless, life and death are at strife in every detail. Here you see a woman, there a statue, there again a corpse. Your creation is incomplete. You had only power to breathe a portion of your soul into your beloved work. The fire of Prometheus died out again and again in your hands; many a spot in your picture has not been touched by the divine flame."

"But how is it, dear master?" Porbus asked respectfully, while the young man with difficulty repressed his strong desire to beat the critic.

"Ah!" said the old man, "it is this! You have halted between two manners. You have hesitated between drawing and color, between the dogged attention to detail, the stiff precision of the German masters and the dazzling glow, the joyous exuberance of Italian painters. You have set yourselves to imitate Hans Holbein and Titian, Albrecht Dürer and Paul Veronese in a single picture. A magnificent ambition truly, but what has come of it. Your work has neither the severe charm of a dry execution nor the magical illusion of Italian *chiaro-oscuro*. Titian's rich golden coloring poured into Albrecht Dürer's austere outlines has shattered them, like molten bronze bursting through the mould that is not strong enough to hold it. In other places the outlines have held firm, imprisoning and obscuring the magnificent glowing flood of Venetian color. The drawing of the face is not perfect, the coloring is not perfect; traces of that unlucky indecision are to be seen everywhere. Unless you felt strong enough to fuse the two opposed manners in the fire of your own genius, you should have cast in your lot boldly with the one or the other, and so have obtained the unity which simulates one of the conditions of life itself. Your work is only true in the centres; your outlines are false, they project nothing, there is no hint of anything behind them. There is truth here," said the old man, pointing to the breast of the

saint, "and again here," he went on, indicating the rounded shoulder. "But there," once more returning to the column of the throat, "everything is false. Let us go no farther into detail; you would be disheartened."

The old man sat down on a stool, and remained a while without speaking, with his face buried in his hands.

"Yet I studied that throat from the life, dear master," Porbus began; "it happens sometimes, for our misfortune, that real effects in nature look improbable when transferred to canvas——"

"The aim of art is not to copy nature, but to express it. You are not a servile copyist, but a poet!" cried the old man sharply, cutting Porbus short with an imperious gesture. "Otherwise a sculptor might make a plaster cast of a living woman and save himself all further trouble. Well, try to make a cast of your mistress' hand, and set up the thing before you. You will see a monstrosity, a dead mass, bearing no resemblance to the living hand: you would be compelled to have recourse to the chisel of a sculptor who, without making an exact copy, would represent for you its movement and its life. We must detect the spirit, the informing soul in the appearances of things and beings. Effects! What are effects but the accidents of life, not life itself? A hand, since I have taken that example, is not only a part of a body, it is the expression and extension of a thought that must be grasped and rendered. Neither painter nor poet nor sculptor may separate the effect from the cause, which are inevitably contained the one in the other. There begins the real struggle! Many a painter achieves success instinctively, unconscious of the task that is set before art. You draw a woman, yet you do not see her! Not so do you succeed in wresting nature's secrets from her! You are reproducing mechanically the model that you copied in your master's studio. You do not penetrate far enough into the inmost secrets of the mystery of form; you do not seek with love enough and perseverance

enough after the form that baffles and eludes you. Beauty is a thing severe and unapproachable, never to be won by a languid love. You must lie in wait for her coming and take her unawares, press her hard and clasp her in a tight embrace, and force her to yield. Form is a Proteus more intangible and more manifold than the Proteus of the legend; compelled, only after long wrestling, to stand forth manifest in his true aspect. Some of you are satisfied with the first shape, or at most by the second or the third that appears. Not thus wrestle the victors, the unvanquished painters who never suffer themselves to be deluded by all those treacherous shadow-shapes; they persevere till nature at the last stands bare to their gaze, and her very soul is revealed.

"In this manner worked Rafael," said the old man, taking off his cap to express his reverence for the king of art. "His transcendent greatness came of the intimate sense that, in him, seems as if it would shatter external form. Form in his figures (as with us) is a symbol, a means of communicating sensations, ideas, the vast imaginings of a poet. Every face is a whole world. The subject of the portrait appeared for him bathed in the light of a divine vision; it was revealed by an inner voice, the finger of God laid bare the sources of expression in the past of a whole life.

"You clothe your women in fair raiment of flesh, in gracious veiling of hair; but where is the blood, the source of passion and of calm, the cause of the particular effect? Why, this brown Egyptian of yours, my good Porbus, is a colorless creature! These figures that you set before us are painted bloodless phantoms; and you call that painting, you call that art!

"Because you have made something more like a woman than a house, you think that you have set your fingers on the goal; you are quite proud that you need not to write *currus venustus* or *pulcher homo* beside your figures, as early painters were wont to do, and you fancy that you have done wonders.

Ah! my good friend, there is still something more to learn, and you will use up a great deal of chalk and cover many a canvas before you will learn it. Yes, truly, a woman carries her head in just such a way, so she holds her garments gathered into her hand; her eyes grow dreamy and soft with that expression of meek sweetness, and even so the quivering shadow of the lashes hovers upon her cheeks. It is all there, and yet it is not there. What is lacking? A nothing, but that nothing is everything.

"There you have the semblance of life, but you do not express its fulness and effluence, that indescribable something, perhaps the soul itself, that envelops the outlines of the body like a haze; that flower of life, in short, that Titian and Rafael caught. Your utmost achievement hitherto has only brought you to the starting-point. You might now perhaps begin to do excellent work, but you grow weary all too soon; and the crowd admires, and those who know smile.

"Oh, Mabuse! oh, my master!" cried the strange speaker, "thou art a thief! Thou hast carried away the secret of life with thee!"

"Nevertheless," he began again, "this picture of yours is worth more than all the paintings of that rascal Rubens, with his mountains of Flemish flesh raddled with vermilion, his torrents of red hair, his riot of color. You, at least, have color there, and feeling and drawing—the three essentials in art."

The young man roused himself from his deep musings.

"Why, my good man, the saint is sublime!" he cried. "There is a subtlety of imagination about those two figures, the Saint Mary and the Shipman, that cannot be found among Italian masters; I do not know a single one of them capable of imaging the Shipman's hesitation."

"Did that little malapert come with you?" asked Porbus of the older man.

"Alas! master, pardon my boldness," cried the neophyte,

and the color mounted to his face. "I am unknown—a dauber by instinct, and but lately come to this city—the fountain-head of all learning."

"Set to work," said Porbus, handing him a bit of red chalk and a sheet of paper.

The new-comer quickly sketched the Saint Mary line for line.

"Aha!" exclaimed the old man. "Your name?" he added.

The young man quickly wrote "Nicolas Poussin" below the sketch.

"Not bad that for a beginning," said the strange speaker, who had discoursed so wildly. "I see that we can talk of art in your presence. I do not blame you for admiring Porbus' saint. In the eyes of the world she is a masterpiece, and those alone who have been initiated into the inmost mysteries of art can discover her shortcomings. But it is worth while to give you the lesson, for you are able to understand it, so I will show you how little it needs to complete this picture. You must be all eyes, all attention, for it may be that such a chance of learning will never come in your way again. Porbus! your palette."

Porbus went in search of palette and brushes. The little old man turned back his sleeves with impatient energy, seized the palette, covered with many hues, that Porbus handed to him, and snatched rather than took a handful of brushes of various sizes from the hands of his acquaintance. His pointed beard suddenly bristled—a singular movement that expressed the object of a lover's fancy. As he loaded his brush, he muttered between his teeth, "These paints are only fit to fling out of the window, together with the fellow who ground them, their crudeness and falseness are disgusting! How can one paint with this?"

He dipped the tip of the brush with feverish eagerness in the different pigments, making the circuit of the palette several

times more quickly than the organist of a cathedral sweeps the octaves on the keyboard of his clavier for the *O Filii* at Easter.

Porbus and Poussin, on either side of the easel, stood stock-still, watching with intense interest.

"Look, young man," he began again, "see how three or four strokes of the brush and a thin glaze of blue let in the free air to play about the head of the poor saint, who must have felt stifled and oppressed by the close atmosphere! See how the drapery begins to flutter; you feel that it is lifted by the breeze! A moment ago it hung as heavily and stiffly as if it were held out by pins. Do you see how the satin sheen that I have just given to the breast rends the pliant, silken softness of a young girl's skin, and how the brown-red, blended with burnt ochre, brings warmth into the cold gray of the deep shadow where the blood lay congealed instead of coursing through the veins? Young man, young man, no master could teach you how to do this that I am doing before your eyes. Mabuse alone possessed the secret of giving life to his figures; Mabuse had but one pupil—that was I. I have had none, and I am old. You have sufficient intelligence to imagine the rest from the glimpses that I am giving you."

While the old man was speaking, he gave a touch here and there; sometimes two strokes of the brush, sometimes a single one; but every stroke told so well that the whole picture seemed transfigured—the painting was flooded with light. He worked with such passionate fervor that beads of sweat gathered upon his bare forehead; he worked so quickly, in brief, impatient jerks, that it seemed to young Poussin as if some familiar spirit inhabiting the body of this strange being took a grotesque pleasure in making use of the man's hands against his own will. The unearthly glitter of his eyes, the convulsive movements that seemed like struggles, gave to this fancy a semblance of truth which could not but stir a young imagination. The old man continued, saying as he did so—

"Paf! paf! that is how to lay it on, young man! Little touches! come and bring a glow into those icy cold tones for me! Just so! Pon! pon! pon!" and those parts of the picture that he had pointed out as cold and lifeless flushed with warmer hues, a few bold strokes of color brought all the tones of the picture into the required harmony with the glowing tints of the Egyptian, and the differences in temperament vanished.

"Look you, youngster, the last touches make the picture. Porbus has given it a hundred strokes for every one of mine. No one thanks us for what lies beneath. Bear that in mind."

At last the restless spirit stopped, and turning to Porbus and Poussin, who were speechless with admiration, he spoke—

"This is not as good as my *Belle Noiseuse;* still one might put one's name to such a thing as this. Yes, I would put my name to it," he added, rising to reach for a mirror, in which he looked at the picture. "And now," he said, "will you both come and breakfast with me. I have a smoked ham and some very fair wine! Eh! eh! the times may be bad, but we can still have some talk about art! We can talk like equals. Here is a little fellow who has aptitude," he added, laying a hand on Nicolas Poussin's shoulder.

In this way the stranger became aware of the threadbare condition of the Norman's doublet. He drew a leather purse from his girdle, felt in it, found two gold coins, and held them out.

"I will buy your sketch," he said.

"Take it," said Porbus, as he saw the other start and flush with embarrassment, for Poussin had the pride of poverty. "Pray take it; he has a couple of king's ransoms in his pouch!"

The three came down together from the studio, and, talking of art by the way, reached a picturesque wooden house hard by the Pont Saint-Michel. Poussin wondered a moment at its ornament, at the knocker, at the frames of the casements, at

the scroll-work designs, and in the next he stood in a vast low-ceiled room. A table, covered with tempting dishes, stood near the blazing fire, and (luck unhoped for) he was in the company of two great artists full of genial good-humor.

"Do not look too long at that canvas, young man," said Porbus, when he saw that Poussin was standing, struck with wonder, before a painting. "You would fall a victim to despair."

It was the *Adam* painted by Mabuse to purchase his release from the prison where his creditors had so long kept him. And as a matter of fact, the figure stood out so boldly and convincingly that Nicolas Poussin began to understand the real meaning of the words poured out by the old artist, who was himself looking at the picture with apparent satisfaction, but without enthusiasm. "I have done better than that!" he seemed to be saying to himself.

"There is life in it," he said aloud; "in that respect my poor master here surpassed himself, but there is some lack of truth in the background. The man lives indeed; he is rising, and will come towards us; but the atmosphere, the sky, the air, the breath of the breeze—you look and feel for them, but they are not there. And then the man himself is, after all, only a man! Ah! but the one man in the world who came direct from the hands of God must have had a something divine about him that is wanting here. Mabuse himself would grind his teeth and say so when he was not drunk."

Poussin looked from the speaker to Porbus, and from Porbus to the speaker, with restless curiosity. He went up to the latter to ask for the name of their host; but the painter laid a finger on his lips with an air of mystery. The young man's interest was excited; he kept silence, but hoped that sooner or later some word might be let fall that would reveal the name of his entertainer. It was evident that he was a man of talent and very wealthy, for Porbus listened to him respectfully, and the vast room was crowded with marvels of art.

A magnificent portrait of a woman, hung against the dark oak panels of the wall, next caught Poussin's attention.

"What a glorious Giorgione!" he cried.

"No," said his host, "it is an early daub of mine——"

"Gramercy! I am in the abode of the god of painting, it seems!" cried Poussin ingenuously.

The old man smiled as if he had long grown familiar with such praise.

"Master Frenhofer!" said Porbus, "do you think you could send me a little of your capital Rhine wine?"

"A couple of pipes!" answered his host; "one to discharge a debt, for the pleasure of seeing your pretty sinner, the other as a present from a friend."

"Ah! if I had my health," returned Porbus, "and if you would but let me see your *Belle Noiseuse*, I would paint some great picture, with breadth in it and depth; the figures should be life-size."

"Let you see my work!" cried the painter in agitation. "No, no! it is not perfect yet; something still remains for me to do. Yesterday, in the dusk," he said, "I thought I had reached the end. Her eyes seemed moist, the flesh quivered, something stirred the tresses of her hair. She breathed! But though I had succeeded in reproducing nature's roundness and relief on the flat surface of the canvas, this morning, by daylight, I found out my mistake. Ah! to achieve that glorious result I have studied the works of the great masters of color, stripping off coat after coat of color from Titian's canvas, analyzing the pigments of the king of light. Like that sovereign painter, I began the face in a slight tone with a supple and fat paste—for shadow is but an accident; bear that in mind, youngster!—Then I began afresh, and by half-tones and thin glazes of color less and less transparent, I gradually deepened the tints to the deepest black of the strongest shadows. An ordinary painter makes his shadows something entirely different in nature from the

high-lights; they are wood or brass, or what you will, anything but flesh in shadow. You feel that even if those figures were to alter their position, those shadow stains would never be cleansed away, those parts of the picture would never glow with light.

"I have escaped one mistake, into which the most famous painters have sometimes fallen; in my canvas the whiteness shines through the densest and most persistent shadow. I have not marked out the limits of my figure in hard, dry outlines, and brought every least anatomical detail into prominence (like a host of dunces, who fancy that they can draw because they can trace a line elaborately smooth and clean), for the human body is not contained within the limits of line. In this the sculptor can approach the truth more nearly than we painters. Nature's way is a complicated succession of curve within curve. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as drawing. Do not laugh, young man; strange as that speech may seem to you, you will understand the truth in it some day. A line is a method of expressing the effect of light upon an object; but there are no lines in nature, everything is solid. We draw by modeling—that is to say, we disengage an object from its setting; the distribution of the light alone gives to a body the appearance by which we know it. So I have not defined the outlines; I have suffused them with a haze of half-tints, warm or golden, in such a way that you cannot lay your finger on the exact spot where background and contours meet. Seen from near, the picture looks a blur: it seems to lack definition; but step back two paces, and the whole thing becomes clear, distinct, and solid; the body stands out, the rounded form comes into relief; you feel that the air plays round it. And yet—I am not satisfied; I have misgivings. Perhaps one ought not to draw a single line; perhaps it would be better to attack the face from the centre, taking the highest prominences first, proceeding from them through the whole range of shadows to the heaviest of

all. Is not this the method of the sun, the divine painter of the world? Oh, nature! nature! who has surprised thee, fugitive? But, after all, too much knowledge, like ignorance, brings you to a negation. I have doubts about my work."

There was a pause. Then the old man spoke again: "I have been at work upon it for ten years, young man; but what are ten short years in a struggle with nature? Do we know how long Pygmalion wrought at the one statue that came to life?"

The old man fell into deep musings, and gazed before him with wide unseeing eyes, while he played unheedingly with his knife.

"Look, he is in converse with his *dæmon*!" murmured Porbus.

At the word, Nicolas Poussin felt himself carried away by an unaccountable accession of artist's curiosity. For him the old man, at once intent and inert, the seer with the unseeing eyes, became something more than a man—a fantastic spirit living in a mysterious world, and countless vague thoughts awoke within his soul. The effect of this species of fascination upon his mind can no more be described in words than the passionate longing awakened in an exile's heart by the song that recalls his home. He thought of the scorn that the old man affected to display for the noblest efforts of art, of his wealth, his manners, of the deference paid to him by Porbus. The mysterious picture, the work of patience on which he had wrought so long in secret, was doubtless a work of genius, for the head of the Virgin which young Poussin had admired so frankly was beautiful even beside Mabuse's *Adam*—there was no mistaking the imperial manner of one of the princes of art. Everything combined to set the old man beyond the limits of human nature.

Out of the wealth of fancies in Nicolas Poussin's brain an idea grew, and gathered shape and clearness. He saw in this supernatural being a complete type of the artist nature, a na-

ture mocking and kindly, barren and prolific, an erratic spirit intrusted with great and manifold powers, which she too often abuses, leading sober reason, the Philistine, and sometimes even the amateur forth into a stony wilderness where they see nothing; but the white-winged maiden herself, wild as her fancies may be, finds epics there and castles and works of art. For Poussin, the enthusiast, the old man, was suddenly transfigured, and became art incarnate, art with its mysteries, its vehement passion and its dreams. For Poussin the old man now represented a grand ideal.

"Yes, my dear Porbus," Frenhofer continued, "hitherto I have never found a flawless model, a body with outlines of perfect beauty, the carnations—Ah! where does she live?" he cried, breaking in upon himself, "the undiscoverable Venus of the olden time, for whom we have sought so often, only to find the scattered gleams of her beauty here and there? Oh! to behold once and for one moment, nature grown perfect and divine, the ideal at last, I would give all that I possess. Nay, beauty divine, I would go to seek thee in the dim land of the dead; like Orpheus, I would go down into the hades of art to bring back the life of art from among the shadows of death."

"We can go now," said Porbus to Poussin. "He neither hears nor sees us any longer."

"Let us go to his studio," said young Poussin, wondering greatly.

"Oh! the old fox takes care that no one shall enter it. His treasures are so carefully guarded that it is impossible for us to come at them. I have not waited for your suggestion and your fancy to attempt to lay hands on this mystery by force."

"So there is a mystery?"

"Yes," answered Porbus. "Old Frenhofer is the only pupil Mabuse would take. Frenhofer became the painter's friend, deliverer, and father; he sacrificed the greater part

of his fortune to enable Mabuse to indulge in riotous extravagance, and in return Mabuse bequeathed to him the secret of relief, the power of giving to his figures the wonderful life, the flower of nature, the eternal despair of art, the secret which Mabuse knew so well that one day when he had sold the flowered brocade suit in which he should have appeared at the Entry of Charles V., he accompanied his master in a suit of paper painted to resemble the brocade. The peculiar richness and splendor of the stuff struck the Emperor; he complimented the old drunkard's patron on the artist's appearance, and so the trick was brought to light. Frenhofer is a passionate enthusiast, who sees above and beyond other painters. He has meditated profoundly on color, and the absolute truth of line; but by the way of much research he has come to doubt the very existence of the objects of his search. He says, in moments of despondency, that there is no such thing as drawing, and that by means of lines we can only reproduce geometrical figures; but that is overshooting the mark; for by outline and shadow you can reproduce form without any color at all, which shows that our art, like nature, is composed of an infinite number of elements. Drawing gives you the skeleton, the anatomical framework, and color puts the life into it; but life without the skeleton is even more incomplete than a skeleton without life. But there is something else truer still, and it is this—for painters, practice and observation are everything; and when theories and political ideas begin to quarrel with the brushes, the end is doubt, as has happened with our good friend, who is half-crack-brained enthusiast, half-painter. A sublime painter! but, unluckily for him, he was born to riches, and so he has leisure to follow his fancies. Do not you follow his example! Work! painters have no business to think, except with brush in hand."

"We will find a way into his studio!" cried Poussin confidently. He had ceased to heed Porbus' remarks. The other

smiled at the young painter's enthusiasm, asked him to come to see him again, and they parted.

Nicolas Poussin went slowly back to the Rue de la Harpe, and passed the modest hostelry where he was lodging without noticing it. A feeling of uneasiness prompted him to hurry up the crazy staircase till he reached a room at the top, a quaint, airy recess under the steep, high-pitched roof common among houses in old Paris. In the one dingy window of the place sat a young girl, who sprang up at once when she heard some one at the door; it was the prompting of love; she had recognized the painter's touch on the latch.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked.

"The matter is—— is—— Oh! I have felt that I am a painter! Until to-day I have had doubts, but now I believe in myself! There is the making of a great man in me! Never mind, Gillette, we shall be rich and happy! There is gold at the tips of those brushes——"

He broke off suddenly. The joy faded from his powerful and earnest face as he compared his vast hopes with his slender resources. The walls were covered with sketches in chalk on sheets of common paper. There were but four canvases in the room. Colors were very costly, and the young painter's palette was almost bare. Yet in the midst of his poverty he possessed and was conscious of the possession of inexhaustible treasures of the heart, of a devouring genius equal to all the tasks that lay before him.

He had been brought to Paris by a nobleman among his friends, or perchance by the consciousness of his powers; and in Paris he had found a mistress, one of those noble and generous souls who choose to suffer by a great man's side, who share his struggles and strive to understand his fancies, accepting their lot of poverty and love as bravely and dauntlessly as other women will set themselves to bear the burden of riches and make a parade of their insensibility. The smile that stole over Gillette's lips filled the garret with golden

light, and rivaled the brightness of the sun in heaven. The sun, moreover, does not always shine in heaven, whereas Gillette was always in the garret, absorbed in her passion, occupied by Poussin's happiness and sorrow, consoling the genius which found an outlet in love before art engrossed it.

"Listen, Gillette. Come here."

The girl obeyed joyously, and sprang upon the painter's knee. Hers was perfect grace and beauty, and the loveliness of spring; she was adorned with all luxuriant fairness of outward form, lighted up by the glow of a fair soul within.

"Oh! God," he cried; "I shall never dare to tell her——"

"A secret?" she cried; "I must know it!"

Poussin was absorbed in his dreams.

"Do tell it to me!"

"Gillette, poor beloved heart!"

"Oh! do you want something of me?"

"Yes."

"If you wish me to sit once more for you as I did the other day," she continued with playful petulance, "I will never consent to do such a thing again, for your eyes say nothing all the while. You do not think of me at all, and yet you look at me——"

"Would you rather have me draw another woman?"

"Perhaps—if she were very ugly," she said.

"Well," said Poussin gravely, "and if, for the sake of my fame to come, if to make me a great painter, you must sit to some one else?"

"You may try me," she said; "you know quite well that I would not."

Poussin's head sank on her breast; he seemed to be overpowered by some intolerable joy or sorrow.

"Listen," she cried, plucking at the sleeve of Poussin's threadbare doublet. "I told you, Nick, that I would lay down my life for you; but I never promised you that I in my lifetime would lay down my love."

"Your love?" cried the young artist.

"If I showed myself thus to another, you would love me no longer, and I should feel myself unworthy of you. Obedience to your fancies was a natural and simple thing, was it not! Even against my own will, I am glad and even proud to do thy dear will. But for another, out upon it!"

"Forgive me, my Gillette," said the painter, falling upon his knees; "I would rather be beloved than famous. You are fairer than success and honors. There; fling the pencils away, and burn these sketches! I have made a mistake. I was meant to love and not to paint. Perish art and all its secrets!"

Gillette looked admiringly at him, in an ecstasy of happiness! She was triumphant; she felt instinctively that art was laid aside for her sake, and flung like a grain of incense at her feet.

"Yet he is only an old man," Poussin continued; "for him you would be a woman, and nothing more. You—so perfect!"

"I must love you indeed!" she cried, ready to sacrifice even love's scruples to the lover who had given up so much for her sake; "but I should bring about my own ruin. Ah! to ruin myself, to lose everything for you!——It is a very glorious thought! Ah! but you will forget me. Oh! what evil thought is this that has come to you? How can you ask such a thing of me?"

"I love you, and yet I thought of it," he said, with something like remorse. "Am I so base a wretch?"

"Let us consult Père Hardouin," she said.

"No, no! let it be a secret between us."

"Very well; I will do it. But you must not be there," she said. "Stay at the door with your dagger in your hand; and if I call, rush in and kill the painter."

Poussin forgot everything but art. He held Gillette tightly in his arms.

"He loves me no longer!" thought Gillette when she was alone. She repented of her resolution already.

But to these misgivings there soon succeeded a sharper pain, and she strove to banish a hideous thought that arose in her own heart. It seemed to her that her own love had grown less already, with a vague suspicion that the painter had fallen somewhat in her eyes.

II. CATHERINE LESCAULT.

Three months after Poussin and Porbus met, the latter went to see Master Frenhofer. The old man had fallen a victim to one of those profound and spontaneous fits of discouragement that are caused, according to medical logicians, by indigestion, flatulence, fever, or enlargement of the spleen; or, if you take the opinion of the Spiritualists, by the imperfections of our moral nature. The good man had simply overworked himself in putting the finishing touches to his mysterious picture. He was lounging in a huge carved oak chair, covered with black leather, and did not change his listless attitude, but glanced at Porbus like a man who has settled down into low spirits.

"Well, master," said Porbus, "was the ultramarine bad that you sent for to Bruges? Is the new white difficult to grind? Is the oil poor, or are the brushes recalcitrant?"

"Alas!" cried the old man, "for a moment I thought that my work was finished; but I am sure that I am mistaken in certain details, and I cannot rest until I have cleared my doubts. I am thinking of traveling. I am going to Turkey, to Greece, to Asia, in quest of a model, so as to compare my picture with the different living forms of nature. Perhaps," and a smile of contentment stole over his face, "perhaps I

have nature herself up there. At times I am half-afraid that a breath may waken her, and that she will escape me."

He rose to his feet as if to set out at once.

"Aha!" said Porbus, "I have come just in time to save you the trouble and expense of a journey."

"What?" asked Frenhofer in amazement.

"Young Poussin is loved by a woman of incomparable and flawless beauty. But, dear master, if he consents to lend her to you, at the least you ought to let us see your work."

The old man stood motionless and completely dazed.

"What!" he cried piteously at last, "show you my creation, my bride? Rend the veil that has kept my happiness sacred? It would be an infamous profanation. For ten years I have lived with her; she is mine, mine alone; she loves me. Has she not smiled at me, at each stroke of the brush upon the canvas? She has a soul—the soul that I have given her. She would blush if any eyes but mine should rest on her. To exhibit her! Where is the husband, the lover so vile as to bring the woman he loves to dishonor? When you paint a picture for the court, you do not put your whole soul into it; to courtiers you sell lay figures duly colored. My painting is no painting, it is a sentiment, a passion. She was born in my studio, there she must dwell in maiden solitude, and only when clad can she issue thence. Poetry and women only lay the last veil aside for their lovers. Have we Rafael's model, Ariosto's Angelica, Dante's Beatrice? Nay, only their form and semblance. But this picture, locked away above in my studio, is an exception in our art. It is not a canvas, it is a woman—a woman with whom I talk. I share her thoughts, her tears, her laughter. Would you have me fling aside these ten years of happiness like a cloak? Would you have me cease at once to be father, lover, and creator? She is not a creature, but a creation.

"Bring your young painter here. I will give him my treasures; I will give him pictures by Correggio and Michel

Angelo and Titian; I will kiss his footprints in the dust; but —make him my rival! Shame on me. Ah! ah! I am a lover first, and then a painter. Yes, with my latest sigh I could find strength to burn my *Belle Noiseuse;* but—compel her to endure the gaze of a stranger, a young man and a painter! Ah! no, no! I would kill him on the morrow who should sully her with a glance! Nay, you, my friend, I would kill you with my own hands in a moment if you did not kneel in reverence before her! Now, will you have me submit my idol to the careless eyes and senseless criticisms of fools? Ah! love is a mystery; it can only live hidden in the depths of the heart. You say, even to your friend, 'Behold her whom I love,' and there is an end of love."

The old man seemed to have grown young again; there were light and life in his eyes and a faint flush of red in his pale face. His hands shook. Porbus was so amazed by the passionate vehemence of Frenhofer's words that he knew not what to reply to this utterance of an emotion as strange as it was profound. Was Frenhofer sane or mad? Had he fallen a victim to some freak of the artist's fancy? or were these ideas of his produced by that strange lightheadedness which comes over us during the long travail of a work of art. Would it be possible to come to terms with this singular passion?

Harassed by all these doubts, Porbus spoke—"Is it not woman for woman?" he said. "Does not Poussin submit his mistress to your gaze?"

"What is she?" retorted the other. "A mistress who will be false to him sooner or later. Mine will be faithful to me forever."

"Well, well," said Porbus, "let us say no more about it. But you may die before you will find such flawless beauty as hers, even in Asia, and then your picture will be left unfinished."

"Oh! it is finished," said Frenhofer. "Standing before it

you would think that it was a living woman lying on the velvet couch beneath the shadow of the curtains. Perfumes are burning on a golden tripod by her side. You would be tempted to lay your hand upon the tassel of the cord that holds back the curtains; it would seem to you that you saw her breast rise and fall as she breathed; that you beheld the living Catherine Lescault, the beautiful courtesan whom men called *La Belle Noiseuse*. And yet—if I could but be sure ——"

"Then go to Asia," returned Porbus, noticing a certain indecision in Frenhofer's face. And with that Porbus made a few steps towards the door.

By that time Gillette and Nicolas Poussin had reached Frenhofer's house. The girl drew her arm away from her lover's as she stood on the threshold, and shrank back as if some presentiment flashed through her mind.

"Oh! what have I come to do here?" she asked of her lover in low vibrating tones, with her eyes fixed on his.

"Gillette, I have left you to decide; I am ready to obey you in everything. You are my conscience and my glory. Go home again; I shall be happier, perhaps, if you do not ——"

"Am I my own when you speak to me like that? No, no; I am like a child—Come," she added, seemingly with a violent effort; "if our love dies, if I plant a long regret in my heart, your fame will be the reward of my obedience to your wishes, will it not? Let us go in. I shall still live on as a memory on your palette; that shall be life for me afterwards."

The door opened, and the two lovers encountered Porbus, who was surprised by the beauty of Gillette, whose eyes were full of tears. He hurried her, trembling from head to foot, into the presence of the old painter.

"Here!" he cried, "is she not worth all the masterpieces in the world!"

Frenhofer trembled. There stood Gillette in the artless and

childlike attitude of some timid and innocent Giorgione, carried off by brigands, and confronted with a slave merchant. A shame-fast red flushed her face, her eyes drooped, her hands hung by her side, her strength seemed to have failed her, her tears protested against this outrage. Poussin cursed himself in despair that he should have brought his fair treasure from its hiding-place. The lover overcame the artist, and countless doubts assailed Poussin's heart when he saw youth dawn in the old man's eyes, as, like a painter, he discerned every line of the form hidden beneath the young girl's vesture. Then the lover's savage jealousy awoke.

"Gillette!" he cried, "let us go."

The girl turned joyously at the cry and the tone in which it was uttered, raised her eyes to his, looked at him, and fled to his arms.

"Ah! then you love me," she cried; "you love me!" and she burst into tears.

She had spirit enough to suffer in silence, but she had no strength to hide her joy.

"Oh! leave her with me for one moment," said the old painter, "and you shall compare her with my *Catherine*——yes—I consent."

Frenhofer's words likewise came from him like a lover's cry. His vanity seemed to be engaged for his semblance of womanhood; he anticipated the triumph of the beauty of his own creation over the beauty of the living girl.

"Do not give him time to change his mind!" cried Porbus, striking Poussin on the shoulder. "The flower of love soon fades, but the flower of art is immortal."

"Then am I only a woman now for him?" said Gillette. She was watching Poussin and Porbus closely.

She raised her head proudly; she glanced at Frenhofer, and her eyes flashed; then as she saw how her lover had fallen again to gazing at the portrait which he had taken at first for a Giorgione—

"Ah!" she cried; "let us go up to the studio. He never gave me such a look."

The sound of her voice recalled Poussin from his dreams.

"Old man," he said, "do you see this blade? I will plunge it into your heart at the first cry from this young girl; I will set fire to your house, and no one shall leave it alive. Do you understand?"

Nicolas Poussin scowled, every word was a menace. Gillette took comfort from the young painter's bearing, and yet more from that gesture, and almost forgave him for sacrificing her to his art and his glorious future.

Porbus and Poussin stood at the door of the studio and looked at each other in silence. At first the painter of the Saint Mary of Egypt hazarded some exclamations: "Ah! she has taken off her clothes; he told her to come into the light—he is comparing the two!" but the sight of the deep distress in Poussin's face suddenly silenced him; and though old painters no longer feel these scruples, so petty in the presence of art, he admired them because they were so natural and gracious in the lover. The young man kept his hand on the hilt of his dagger, and his ear was almost glued to the door. The two men standing in the shadow might have been conspirators waiting for the hour when they might strike down a tyrant.

"Come in, come in," cried the old man. He was radiant with delight. "My work is perfect. I can show her now with pride. Never shall painter, brushes, colors, light and canvas produce a rival for *Catherine Lescault*, the beautiful courtesan!"

Porbus and Poussin, burning with eager curiosity, hurried into a vast studio. Everything was in disorder and covered with dust, but they saw a few pictures here and there upon the wall. They stopped first of all in admiration before the life-sized figure of a woman partially draped.

"Oh! never mind that," said Frenhofer; that is a rough

daub that I made, a study, a pose, it is nothing. These are my failures," he went on, indicating the enchanting compositions upon the walls of the studio.

This scorn for such works of art struck Porbus and Poussin dumb with amazement. They looked round for the picture of which he had spoken, and could not discover it.

"Look here!" said the old man. His hair was disordered, his face aglow with a more than human exaltation, his eyes glittered, he breathed hard like a young lover frenzied by love.

"Aha!" he cried, "you did not expect to see such perfection! You are looking for a picture, and you see a woman before you. There is such depth in that canvas, the atmosphere is so true that you cannot distinguish it from the air that surrounds us. Where is art? Art has vanished, it is invisible! It is the form of a living girl that you see before you. Have I not caught the very hues of life, the spirit of the living line that defines the figure? Is there not the effect produced there like that which all natural objects present in the atmosphere about them, or fishes in the water? Do you see how the figure stands out against the background? Does it not seem to you that you could pass your hand along the back? But then for seven years I studied and watched how the daylight blends with the objects on which it falls. And the hair, the light pours over it like a flood, does it not? Ah! she breathed, I am sure that she breathed! Her breast —ah, see! Who would not fall on his knees before her? Her pulses throb. She will rise to her feet. Wait!" continued the old man, in the height of his enthusiasm.

"Do you see anything?" Poussin asked of Porbus.

"No; do you?"

"I see nothing."

The two painters left the old man to his ecstasy, and tried to ascertain whether the light that fell full upon the canvas had in some way neutralized all the effect for them. They

moved to the right and left of the picture; then they came in front, bending down and standing upright by turns.

"Yes, yes, it is really canvas," said Frenhofer, who mistook the nature of this minute investigation.

"Look! the canvas is on a stretcher, here is the easel; indeed, here are my colors, my brushes," and he took up a brush and held it out to them, all unsuspicious of their thought.

"The old *lansquenet* is laughing at us," said Poussin, coming once more towards the supposed picture. "I can see nothing there but confused masses of color and a multitude of fantastical lines that go to make a dead wall of paint."

"We are mistaken, look!" said Porbus.

In a corner of the canvas as they came nearer they distinguished a bare foot emerging from the chaos of color, half-tints and vague shadows that made up a dim formless fog. Its living delicate beauty held them spellbound. This fragment that had escaped an incomprehensible, slow, and gradual destruction seemed to them like the Parian marble torso of some Venus emerging from the ashes of a ruined town.

"There is a woman beneath," exclaimed Porbus, calling Poussin's attention to the coats of paint with which the old artist had overlaid and concealed his work in the quest of perfection.

Both artists turned involuntarily to Frenhofer. They began to have some understanding, vague though it was, of the ecstasy in which he lived.

"He believes it in all good faith," said Porbus.

"Yes, my friend," said the old man, rousing himself from his dreams, "it needs faith, faith in art, and you must live for long with your work to produce such a creation. What toil some of those shadows have cost me. Look! there is a faint shadow there upon the cheek beneath the eyes—if you saw that on a human face, it would seem to you that you could never

render it with paint. Do you think that that effect has not cost unheard-of toil?

"But not only so, dear Porbus. Look closely at my work, and you will understand more clearly what I was saying as to methods of modeling and outline. Look at the high-lights on the bosom, and see how by touch on touch, thickly laid on, I have raised the surface so that it catches the light itself and blends it with the lustrous whiteness of the high-lights, and how by an opposite process, by flattening the surface of the paint, and leaving no trace of the passage of the brush, I have succeeded in softening the contours of my figure and enveloping them in half-tints until the very idea of drawing, of the means by which the effect is produced, fades away, and the picture has the roundness and relief of nature. Come closer. You will see the manner of working better; at a little distance it cannot be seen. There! Just there, it is, I think, very plainly to be seen," and with the tip of his brush he pointed out a patch of transparent color to the two painters.

Porbus, laying a hand on the old artist's shoulder, turned to Poussin with a "Do you know that in him we see a very great painter?"

"He is even more of a poet than a painter," Poussin answered gravely.

"There," Porbus continued, as he touched the canvas, "lies the utmost limit of our art on earth."

"Beyond that point it loses itself in the skies," said Poussin.

"What joys lie there on that piece of canvas!" exclaimed Porbus.

The old man, deep in his own musings, smiled at the woman he alone beheld, and did not hear.

"But sooner or later he will find out that there is nothing there!" cried Poussin.

"Nothing on my canvas!" said Frenhofer, looking in turn at either painter and at his picture.

"What have you done?" muttered Porbus, turning to Poussin.

The old man clutched the young painter's arm and said, "Do you see nothing? clodpate? Huguenot! varlet! cullion! What brought you here into my studio? My good Porbus," he went on, as he turned to the painter, "are you also making a fool of me? Answer! I am your friend. Tell me, have I ruined my picture after all?"

Porbus hesitated and said nothing, but there was such intolerable anxiety in the old man's white face that he pointed to the easel.

"Look!" he said.

Frenhofer looked for a moment at his picture, and staggered back.

"Nothing! nothing! After ten years of work——"

He sat down and wept.

"So I am a dotard, a madman, I have neither talent nor power! I am only a rich man, who works for his own pleasure, and makes no progress. I have done nothing after all!"

He looked through his tears at his picture. Suddenly he rose and stood proudly before the two painters.

"By the body and blood of Christ," he cried with flashing eyes, "you are jealous! You would have me think that my picture is a failure because you want to steal her from me! Ah! I see her, I see her," he cried, "she is marvelously beautiful——"

At that moment Poussin heard the sound of weeping; Gillette was crouching forgotten in a corner. All at once the painter again became the lover. "What is it, my angel?" he asked her.

"Kill me!" she sobbed. "I must be a vile thing if I love you still, for I despise you. I admire you, and I loathe you! I love you, and I feel that I hate you even now."

While Gillette's words sounded in Poussin's ears, Frenhofer

drew a green serge covering over his *Catherine* with the sober deliberation of a jeweler who locks his drawers when he suspects his visitors to be expert thieves. He gave the two painters a profoundly astute glance that expressed to the full his suspicions and his contempt for them, saw them out of his studio with impetuous haste and in silence, until from the threshold of his house he bade them "Good-bye, my young friends!"

That farewell struck a chill of dread into the two painters. Porbus, in anxiety, went again on the morrow to see Frenhofer, and learned that he had died in the night after burning his canvases.

PARIS, *February*, 1832.

CHRIST IN FLANDERS.

(*Christ en Flanders.*)

To Marcelline Desbordes-Valmore, a daughter of Flanders, of whom these modern days may well be proud, I dedicate this quaint legend of old Flanders.

DE BALZAC.

AT a dimly remote period in the history of Brabant, communication between the Island of Cadzand and the Flemish coast was kept up by a boat which carried passengers from one shore to the other. Middelburg, the chief town in the island, destined to become so famous in the annals of Protestantism, at that time only numbered some two or three hundred hearths; and the prosperous town of Ostend was an obscure haven, a straggling village where pirates dwelt in security among the fishermen and the few poor merchants who lived in the place.

But though the town of Ostend consisted altogether of some score of houses and three hundred cottages, huts or hovels built of the driftwood of wrecked vessels, it nevertheless rejoiced in the possession of a governor, a garrison, a forked gibbet, a convent, and a burgomaster; in short, in all the institutions of an advanced civilization.

Who reigned over Brabant and Flanders in those days? On this point tradition is mute. Let us confess at once that this tale savours strongly of the marvelous, the mysterious, and the vague; elements which Flemish narrators have infused into a story retailed so often to gatherings of workers on winter evenings, that the versions vary widely in poetic merit and incongruity of detail. It has been told by every genera-

tion, handed down by grandames at the fireside, narrated night and day, and the version has changed its complexion somewhat in every age. Like some great building that has suffered many modifications of successive generations of architects, some sombre weather-beaten pile, the delight of a poet, the story would drive the commentator and the industrious winnower of words, facts, and dates to despair. The narrator believes in it, as all superstitious minds in Flanders likewise believe; and is not a whit wiser nor more credulous than his audience. But as it would be impossible to make a harmony of all the different renderings, here are the outlines of the story; stripped, it may be, of its picturesque quaintness, but with all its bold disregard of historical truth, and its moral teaching approved by religion—a myth, the blossom of imaginative fancy; an allegory that the wise may interpret to suit themselves. To each his own pasturage, and the task of separating the tares from the wheat.

The boat that served to carry passengers from the Island of Cadzand to Ostend was upon the point of departure; but before the skipper loosed the chain that secured the shallop to the little jetty, where people embarked, he blew a horn several times, to warn late-comers, this being his last journey that day. Night was falling. It was scarcely possible to see the coast of Flanders by the dying fires of the sunset, or to make out upon the hither shore any forms of belated passengers hurrying along the wall of the dykes that surrounded the open country, or among the tall reeds of the marshes. The boat was full.

"What are you waiting for? Let us put off!" they cried.

Just at that moment a man appeared a few paces from the jetty, to the surprise of the skipper, who had heard no sound of footsteps. The traveler seemed to have sprung up from the earth, like a peasant who had laid himself down on the ground to wait till the boat should start, and had slept till the

sound of the horn awakened him. Was he a thief? or some one belonging to the custom-house or the police?

As soon as the man appeared on the jetty to which the boat was moored, seven persons who were standing in the stern of the shallop hastened to sit down on the benches, so as to leave no room for the new-comer. It was the swift and instinctive working of the aristocratic spirit, an impulse of exclusiveness that comes from the rich man's heart. Four of the seven personages belonged to the most aristocratic families in Flanders. First among them was a young knight with two beautiful greyhounds; his long hair flowed from beneath a jeweled cap; he clanked his gilded spurs, curled the ends of his mustache from time to time with a swaggering grace, and looked round disdainfully on the rest of the crew. A high-born damsel, with a falcon on her wrist, only spoke with her mother or with a churchman of high rank, who was evidently a relation. All these persons made a great deal of noise, and talked among themselves as though there were no one else in the boat; yet close beside them sat a man of great importance in the district, a stout burgher of Bruges, wrapped about with a vast cloak. His servant, armed to the teeth, had set down a couple of bags filled with gold at his side. Next to the burgher came a man of learning, a doctor of the University of Louvain, who was traveling with his clerk. This little group of folk, who looked contemptuously at each other, was separated from the passengers in the forward part of the boat by the bench of rowers.

The belated traveler glanced about him as he stepped on board, saw that there was no room for him in the stern, and went to the bow in quest of a seat. They were all poor people there. At first sight of the bareheaded man in the brown camlet coat and trunk-hose, and plain stiff linen collar, they noticed that he wore no ornaments, carried no cap nor bonnet in his hand, and had neither sword nor purse at his girdle, and one and all took him for a burgomaster sure of his

authority, a worthy and kindly burgomaster like so many a Fleming of old times, whose homely features and characters have been immortalized by Flemish painters. The poorer passengers, therefore, received him with demonstrations of respect that provoked scornful tittering at the other end of the boat. An old soldier, inured to toil and hardship, gave up his place on the bench to the new-comer, and seated himself on the edge of the vessel, keeping his balance by planting his feet against one of those transverse beams, like the backbone of a fish, that hold the planks of a boat together. A young mother, who bore her baby in her arms, and seemed to belong to the working class in Ostend, moved aside to make room for the stranger. There was neither servility nor scorn in her manner of doing this; it was a simple sign of the good-will by which the poor, who know by long experience the value of a service and the warmth that fellowship brings, give expression to the openheartedness and the natural impulses of their souls; so artlessly do they reveal their good qualities and their defects. The stranger thanked her by a gesture full of gracious dignity, and took his place between the young mother and the old soldier. Immediately behind him sat a peasant and his son, a boy ten years of age. A beggar woman, old, wrinkled and clad in rags, was crouching, with her almost empty wallet, on a great coil of rope that lay in the prow. One of the rowers, an old sailor, who had known her in the days of her beauty and prosperity, had let her come in "for the love of God," in the beautiful phrase that the common people use.

"Thank you kindly, Thomas," the old woman had said. "I will say two *Paters* and two *Aves* for you in my prayers to-night."

The skipper blew his horn for the last time, looked along the silent shore, flung off the chain, ran along the side of the boat, and took up his position at the helm. He looked at the sky, and as soon as they were out in the open sea, he shouted to the men: "Pull away, pull with all your might! The sea

is smiling at a squall, the witch! I can feel the swell by the way the rudder works, and the storm in my wounds."

The nautical phrases, unintelligible to ears unused to the sound of the sea, seemed to put fresh energy into the oars; they kept time together, the rhythm of the movement was still even and steady, but quite unlike the previous manner of rowing; it was as if a cantering horse had broken into a gallop. The gay company seated in the stern amused themselves by watching the brawny arms, the tanned faces, and sparkling eyes of the rowers, the play of the tense muscles, the physical and mental forces that were being exerted to bring them for a trifling toll across the channel. So far from pitying the rowers' distress, they pointed out the men's faces to each other, and laughed at the grotesque expressions on the faces of the crew who were straining every muscle; but in the fore part of the boat the soldier, the peasant, and the old beggar woman watched the sailors with the sympathy naturally felt by toilers who live by the sweat of their brow and know the rough struggle, the strenuous excitement of effort. These folk, moreover, whose lives were spent in the open air, had all seen the warnings of danger in the sky, and their faces were grave. The young mother rocked her child, singing an old hymn of the Church for a lullaby.

"If we ever get there at all," the soldier remarked to the peasant," it will be because the Almighty is bent on keeping us alive."

"Ah! He is the Master," said the old woman, "but I think it will be His good pleasure to take us to Himself. Just look at that light down there——" and she nodded her head towards the sunset as she spoke.

Streaks of fiery red glared from behind the masses of crimson-flushed brown cloud that seemed about to unloose a furious gale. There was a smothered murmur of the sea, a moaning sound that seemed to come from the depths, a low warning growl, such as a dog gives when he only means mis-

chief as yet. After all, Ostend was not far away. Perhaps painting, like poetry, could not prolong the existence of the picture presented by sea and sky at that moment beyond the time of its actual duration. Art demands vehement contrasts, wherefore artists usually seek out nature's most striking effects, doubtless because they despair of rendering the great and glorious charm of her daily moods; yet the human soul is often stirred as deeply by her calm as by her emotion, and by silence as by storm.

For a moment no one spoke on board the boat. Every one watched that sea and sky, either with some presentiment of danger, or because they felt the influence of the religious melancholy that takes possession of nearly all of us at the close of day, the hour of prayer, when all nature is hushed save for the voices of the bells. The sea gleamed pale and wan, but its hues changed, and the surface took all the colors of steel. The sky was almost overspread with livid gray, but down in the west there were long narrow bars like streaks of blood; while lines of bright light in the eastern sky, sharp and clean as if drawn by the tip of a brush, were separated by folds of cloud, like the wrinkles on an old man's brow. The whole scene made a background of ashen grays and half-tints, in strong contrast to the bale-fires of the sunset. If written language might borrow of spoken language some of the bold figures of speech invented by the people, it might be said with the soldier that "the weather had been routed," or, as the peasant would say, "the sky glowered like an executioner." Suddenly a wind arose from the quarter of the sunset, and the skipper, who never took his eyes off the sea, saw the swell on the horizon line, and cried—

"Stop rowing!"

The sailors stopped immediately, and let their oars lie on the water.

"The skipper is right," said Thomas coolly. A great wave caught up the boat, carried it high on its crest, only to plunge

it, as it were, into the trough of the sea that seemed to yawn for them. At this mighty upheaval, this sudden outbreak of the wrath of the sea, the company in the stern turned pale, and sent up a terrible cry.

"We are lost!"

"Oh, not yet!" said the skipper calmly.

As he spoke, the clouds immediately above their heads were torn asunder by the vehemence of the wind. The gray mass was rent and scattered east and west with ominous speed, a dim uncertain light from the rift in the sky fell full upon the boat, and the travelers beheld each other's faces. All of them, the noble and the wealthy, the sailors and the poor passengers alike, were amazed for a moment by the appearance of the last comer. His golden hair, parted upon his calm, serene forehead, fell in thick curls about his shoulders; and his face, sublime in its sweetness and radiant with divine love, stood out against the surrounding gloom. He had no contempt for death; he knew that he should not die. But if at the first the company in the stern forgot for a moment the implacable fury of the storm that threatened their lives, selfishness and their habits of life soon prevailed again.

"How lucky that stupid burgomaster is not to see the risks we are all running! He is just like a dog, he will die without a struggle," said the doctor.

He had scarcely pronounced this highly judicious dictum when the storm unloosed all its legions. The wind blew from every quarter of the heavens, the boat spun round like a top, and the sea broke in.

"Oh! my poor child! My poor child!——Who will save my baby?" the mother cried in a heartrending voice.

"You yourself will save it," the stranger said.

The thrilling tones of that voice went to the young mother's heart and brought hope with them; she heard the gracious words through all the whistling of the wind and the shrieks of the passengers.

"Holy Virgin of Good Help, who art at Antwerp, I promise thee a thousand pounds of wax and a statue, if thou wilt rescue me from this!" cried the burgher, kneeling upon his bags of gold.

"The Virgin is no more at Antwerp than she is here," was the doctor's comment on this appeal.

"She is in heaven," said a voice that seemed to come from the sea.

"Who said that?"

"'Tis the devil!" exclaimed the servant. "He is scoffing at the Virgin of Antwerp."

"Let us have no more of your Holy Virgin at present," the skipper cried to the passengers. "Put your hands to the scoops and bale the water out of the boat. And the rest of you," he went on, addressing the sailors, "pull with all your might! Now is the time; in the name of the devil who is leaving you in this world, be your own Providence! Every one knows that the channel is fearfully dangerous; I have been to and fro across it these thirty years. Am I facing a storm for the first time to-night?"

He stood at the helm, and looked, as before, at his boat and at the sea and sky in turn.

"The skipper always laughs at everything," muttered Thomas.

"Will God leave us to perish along with those wretched creatures?" asked the haughty damsel of the handsome cavalier.

"No, no, noble maiden. Listen!" and he caught her by the waist and said in her ear, "I can swim; say nothing about it! I will hold you by your fair hair and bring you safely to the shore; but I can only save you."

The girl looked at her aged mother. The lady was on her knees entreating absolution of the bishop, who did not heed her. In the beautiful eyes the knight read a vague feeling of filial piety, and spoke in a smothered voice:

"Submit yourself to the will of God. If it is His pleasure to take your mother to Himself, it will doubtless be for her happiness—in the other world," he added, and his voice dropped still lower. "And for ours in this," he thought within himself.

The Dame of Rupelmonde was lady of seven fiefs beside the barony of Gâvres.

The girl felt the longing for life in her heart, and for love that spoke through the handsome adventurer, a young miscreant who haunted churches in search of a prize, an heiress to marry or ready money. The bishop bestowed his benison on the waves, and bade them be calm; it was all that he could do. He thought of his concubine, and of the delicate feast with which she would welcome him; perhaps at that very moment she was bathing, perfuming herself, robing herself in velvet, fastening her necklace and her jeweled clasps, and the perverse bishop so far from thinking of the power of Holy Church, of his duty to comfort Christians and exhort them to trust in God, that worthy's regrets and lover's sighs mingled with the holy words of the breviary. By the dim light that shone on the pale faces of the company, it was possible to see their differing expressions as the boat was lifted high in air by a wave, to be cast back into the dark depths; the shallop quivered like a fragile leaf, the plaything of the north wind in the autumn; the hull creaked, it seemed ready to go to pieces. Fearful shrieks went up, followed by an awful silence.

There was a strange difference between the behavior of the folk in the bow and that of the rich or great people at the other end of the boat. The young mother clasped her infant tightly to her breast every time that a great wave threatened to engulf the fragile vessel; but she clung to the hope that the stranger's words had set in her heart. Each time that her eyes turned to his face she drew fresh faith at the sight, the strong faith of a helpless woman, a mother's faith. She lived by that divine promise, the loving words from his lips; the

simple creature waited trustingly for them to be fulfilled, and scarcely feared the danger any longer.

The soldier, holding fast to the vessel's side, never took his eyes off the strange visitor. He copied on his own rough and swarthy features the imperturbability of the other's face, applying to this task the whole strength of a will and intelligence but little corrupted in the course of a life of mechanical and passive obedience. So emulous was he of a calm and tranquil courage greater than his own, that at last, perhaps unconsciously, something of that mysterious nature passed into his own soul. His admiration became an instinctive zeal for this man, a boundless love for and belief in him, such a love as soldiers feel for their leader when he has the power of swaying other men, when the halo of victories surrounds him, and the magical fascination of genius is felt in all that he does. The poor outcast was murmuring to herself—

"Ah! miserable wretch that I am! Have I not suffered enough to expiate the sins of my youth? Ah! wretched woman, why did you lead the gay life of a frivolous Frenchwoman? why did you devour the goods of God with churchmen, the substance of the poor with extortioners and fleecers of the poor? Oh! I have sinned indeed! Oh, my God! my God! let me finish my time in hell here in this world of misery." And again she cried, "Holy Virgin, Mother of God, have pity upon me!"

"Be comforted, mother. God is not a Lombard usurer. I may have killed people good and bad at random in my time, but I am not afraid of the resurrection."

"Ah! Master Lancepesade, how happy those fair ladies are, to be so near to a bishop, a holy man! They will get absolution for their sins," said the old woman. "Oh! if I could only hear a priest say to me, 'Thy sins are forgiven!' I should believe it then."

The stranger turned towards her, and the goodness in his face made her tremble.

"Have faith," he said, "and you will be saved."

"May God reward you, good sir," she answered. "If what you say is true, I will go on pilgrimage barefooted to Our Lady of Loretto to pray to her for you and for me."

The two peasants, father and son, were silent, patient, and submissive to the will of God, like folk whose wont it is to fall in instinctively with the ways of nature like cattle. At the one end of the boat stood riches, pride, learning, debauchery, and crime—human society, such as art and thought and education and worldly interests and laws have made it; and at this end there was terror and wailing, innumerable different impulses all repressed by hideous doubts—at this end, and at this only, the agony of fear.

Above all these human lives stood a strong man, the skipper; no doubts assailed him, the chief, the king, the fatalist among them. He was trusting in himself rather than in Providence, crying, "Bale away!" instead of "Holy Virgin," defying the storm, in fact, and struggling with the sea like a wrestler.

But the helpless poor at the other end of the wherry! The mother rocking on her bosom the little one who smiled at the storm; the woman once so frivolous and gay, and now tormented with bitter remorse; the old soldier covered with scars, a mutilated life the sole reward of his unflagging loyalty and faithfulness. This veteran could scarcely count on the morsel of bread soaked in tears to keep the life in him, yet he was always ready to laugh, and went his way merrily, happy when he could drown his glory in the depths of a pot of beer, or could tell tales of the wars to the children who admired him, leaving his future with a light heart in the hands of God. Lastly, there were the two peasants, used to hardships and toil, labor incarnate, the labor by which the world lives. These simple folk were indifferent to thought and its treasures, ready to sink them all in a belief; and their

faith was but so much the more vigorous because they had never disputed about it nor analyzed it. Such a nature is a virgin soil, conscience has not been tampered with, feeling is deep and strong; repentance, trouble, love, and work have developed, purified, concentrated, and increased their force of will a hundred times, the will—the one thing in man that resembles what learned doctors call the soul.

The boat, guided by the wellnigh miraculous skill of the steersman, came almost within sight of Ostend, when, not fifty paces from the shore, she was suddenly struck by a heavy sea and capsized. The stranger with the light about his head spoke to this little world of drowning creatures—

"Those who have faith shall be saved; let them follow me!"

He stood upright, and walked with a firm step upon the waves. The young mother at once took her child in her arms, and followed at his side across the sea. The soldier, too, sprang up, saying in his homely fashion, "Ah! *nom d'un pipe!* I would follow *you* to the devil;" and without seeming astonished by it, he walked on the water. The old worn-out sinner, believing in the omnipotence of God, also followed the stranger.

The two peasants said to each other, "If they are walking on the sea, why should we not do as they do?" and they also arose and hastened after the others. Thomas tried to follow, but his faith tottered; he sank in the sea more than once, and arose again, but the third time he also walked on the sea. The bold steersman clung like a remora to the wreck of his boat. The miser had had faith, and had risen to go, but he tried to take his gold with him, and it was his gold that dragged him down to the bottom. The learned man had scoffed at the charlatan and at the fools who listened to him, and, when he heard the mysterious stranger propose to the passengers that they should walk on the waves, he began to laugh, and the ocean swallowed him. The girl was dragged

down into the depths by her lover. The bishop and the older lady went to the bottom, heavily laden with sins, it may be, but still more heavily laden with incredulity and confidence in idols, weighted down by devotion, into which almsdeeds and true religion entered but little.

The faithful flock, who walked with a firm step high and dry above the surge, heard all about them the dreadful whistling of the blast; great billows broke across their path, but an irresistible force cleft a way for them through the sea. These believing ones saw through the spray a dim speck of light flickering in the window of a fisherman's hut on the shore, and each one, as he pushed on bravely towards the light, seemed to hear the voice of his fellow crying, "Courage!" through all the roaring of the surf; yet no one had spoken a word—so absorbed was each by his own peril. In this way they reached the shore, and eventually found shelter in the fisherman's hut.

When they were all seated near the fisherman's fire, they looked round in vain for their guide with the light about him. The sea washed up the steersman at the base of the cliff on which the cottage stood; he was clinging with might and main to the plank as only a sailor can cling when death stares him in the face; the stranger guide went down and rescued the almost exhausted seaman; then he said, as he held out a succoring hand above the man's head—

"Good, for this once; but do not try it again; the example would be too bad."

He took the skipper on his shoulders, and carried him to the fisherman's door, knocked for admittance for the exhausted man; then, when the door of the humble refuge opened, the Saviour disappeared.

The Convent of Mercy was built for sailors on this spot, where for a long time afterwards (so it was said) the footprints of Jesus Christ could be seen in the sand; but in 1793, at the time of the French invasion, the monks carried away

this precious relic, that bore witness to the Saviour's last visit to earth.

There at the convent I found myself shortly after the Revolution of 1830. I was weary of life. If you had asked me the reason of my despair, I should have found it almost impossible to give it, so languid had grown the soul that was melted within me. The west wind had slackened the springs of my intelligence. A cold, gray light poured down from the heavens, and the murky clouds that passed overhead gave a boding look to the land; all these things, together with the immensity of the sea, said to me, "Die to-day or die to-morrow, still must we not die?" And then I wandered on, musing on the doubtful future, on my blighted hopes. Gnawed by these gloomy thoughts, I turned mechanically into the convent church, with the gray towers that loomed like ghosts through the sea mists. I looked round with no kindling of the imagination at the forest of columns, at the slender arches set aloft upon the leafy capitals, a delicate labyrinth of sculpture. I walked with careless eyes along the side aisles that opened out before me like vast portals, ever turning upon their hinges. It was scarcely possible to see, by the dim light of the autumn day, the sculptured grainings of the roof, the delicate and clean-cut lines of the mouldings of the graceful pointed arches. The organ pipes were mute. There was no sound save the noise of my own footsteps to awaken the mournful echoes lurking in the dark chapels. I sat down at the base of one of the four pillars that supported the tower, near the choir. Thence I could see the whole of the building. I gazed, and no ideas connected with it arose in my mind. I saw without seeing the mighty maze of pillars, the great rose windows that hung like a network suspended as by a miracle in air above the vast doorways. I saw the doors at the end of the side aisles, the aerial galleries, the stained glass windows framed in archways, divided by slender columns, fretted into

flower forms and trefoil by fine filigree work of carved stone. A dome of glass at the end of the choir sparkled as if it had been built of precious stones set cunningly. In contrast to the roof with its alternating spaces of whiteness and color, the two aisles lay to right and left in shadow so deep that the faint gray outlines of their hundred shafts were scarcely visible in the gloom. I gazed at the marvelous arcades, the scroll-work, the garlands, the curving lines, and arabesques interwoven and interlaced, and strangely lighted, until by sheer dint of gazing my perception became confused, and I stood upon the borderland between illusion and reality, taken in the snare set for the eyes, and almost light-headed by reason of the multitudinous changes of the shapes about me.

Imperceptibly a mist gathered about the carven stonework, and I only beheld it through a haze of fine golden dust, like the motes that hover in the bars of sunlight slanting through the air of a chamber. Suddenly the stone lacework of the rose windows gleamed through this vapor that had made all forms so shadowy. Every moulding, the edges of every carving, the least detail of the sculpture were dipped in silver. The sunlight kindled fires in the stained windows, their rich colors sent out glowing sparks of light. The shafts began to tremble, the capitals were gently shaken. A light shudder as of delight ran through the building, the stones were loosened in their setting, the wall-spaces swayed with graceful caution. Here and there a ponderous pier moved as solemnly as a dowager when she condescends to complete a quadrille at the close of a ball. A few slender and graceful columns, their heads adorned with wreaths of trefoil, began to laugh and dance here and there. Some of the pointed arches dashed at the tall lancet windows, which, like ladies of the Middle Ages, wore the armorial bearings of their houses emblazoned on their golden robes. The dance of the mitred arcades with the slender windows became like a fray at a tourney.

In another moment every stone in the church vibrated,

without leaving its place; for the organ-pipes spoke, and I heard divine music mingling with the songs of angels, an unearthly harmony, accompanied by the deep notes of the bells, that boomed as the giant towers rocked and swayed on their square bases. This strange Sabbath seemed to me the most natural thing in the world; and I, who had seen Charles X. hurled from his throne, was no longer amazed by anything. Nay, I myself was gently swaying with a see-saw movement that influenced my nerves pleasurably in a manner of which it is impossible to give any idea. Yet in the midst of this heated riot, the cathedral choir felt cold as if it were a winter day, and I became aware of a multitude of women, robed in white, silent, and impassive, sitting there. The sweet incense smoke that arose from the censers was grateful to my soul. The tall wax candles flickered. The lectern, gay as a chanter undone by the treachery of wine, was skipping about like a peal of Chinese bells.

Then I knew that the whole cathedral was whirling round so fast that everything appeared to be undisturbed. The colossal figure on the crucifix above the altar smiled upon me with a mingled malice and benevolence that frightened me; I turned my eyes away, and marveled at the bluish vapor that slid across the pillars, lending to them an indescribable charm. Then some graceful women's forms began to stir on the friezes. The cherubs which upheld the heavy columns shook out their wings. I felt myself uplifted by some divine power that steeped me in infinite joy, in a sweet and languid rapture. I would have given my life, I think, to have prolonged these phantasmagoria for a little, but suddenly a shrill voice clamored in my ears—

"Awake and follow me!"

A withered woman took my hand in hers; its icy coldness crept through every nerve. The bones of her face showed plainly through the sallow, almost olive-tinted wrinkles of the skin. The shrunken, ice-cold, old woman wore a black robe,

which she trailed in the dust, and at her throat there was something white, which I dared not examine. I could scarcely see her wan and colorless eyes, for they were fixed in a stare upon the heavens. She drew me after her along the aisles, leaving a trace of her presence in the ashes that she shook from her dress. Her bones rattled as she walked, like the bones of a skeleton; and as we went I heard behind me the tinkling of a little bell, a thin, sharp sound that rang through my head like the notes of a harmonica.

"Suffer!" she cried, "suffer! So it must be!"

We came out of the church; we went through the dirtiest streets of the town, till we came at last to a dingy dwelling, and she bade me enter in. She dragged me with her, calling to me in a harsh, tuneless voice like a cracked bell—

"Defend me! defend me!"

Together we went up a winding staircase. She knocked at a door in the darkness, and a mute, like some familiar of the Inquisition, opened to her. In another moment we stood in a room hung with ancient, ragged tapestry, amid piles of old linen, crumpled muslin, and gilded brass.

"Behold the wealth that shall endure forever!" said she.

I shuddered with horror; for just then, by the light of a tall torch and two altar candles, I saw distinctly that this woman was fresh from the graveyard. She had no hair. I turned to fly. She raised her fleshless arm and encircled me with a band of iron set with spikes, and as she raised it a cry went up all about us, the cry of millions of voices—the shouting of the dead!

"It is my purpose to make thee happy forever," she said. "That art my son."

We were sitting before the hearth, the ashes lay cold upon it; the old shrunken woman grasped my hand so tightly in hers that I could not choose but stay. I looked fixedly at her, striving to read the story of her life from the things among which she was crouching. Had she indeed any life in her?

It was a mystery. Yet I saw plainly that once she must have been young and beautiful; fair, with all the charm of simplicity, perfect as some Greeek statue, with the brow of a vestal.

"Ah! ah!" I cried, "now I know thee! Miserable woman, why has thou prostituted thyself? In the age of thy passions, in the time of thy prosperity, the grace and purity of thy youth were forgotten. Forgetful of thy heroic devotion, thy pure life, thy abundant faith, thou didst resign thy primitive power and thy spiritual supremacy for fleshly power. Thy linen vestments, thy couch of moss, the cell in the rock, bright with rays of the Light Divine, were forsaken; thou hast sparkled with diamonds, and shone with the glitter of luxury and pride. Then, grown bold and insolent, seizing and overturning all things in thy course like a courtesan eager for pleasure in her days of splendor, thou has steeped thyself in blood like some queen stupefied by empery. Dost thou not remember to have been dull and heavy at times, and the sudden marvelous lucidity of other moments; as when art emerges from an orgy? Oh! poet, painter, and singer, lover of splendid ceremonies and protector of the arts, was thy friendship for art perchance a caprice, that so thou shouldst sleep beneath magnificent canopies? Was there not a day when, in thy fantastic pride, though chastity and humility were prescribed to thee, thou hadst brought all things beneath thy feet, and set they foot on the necks of princes; when earthly dominion, and wealth, and the mind of man bore thy yoke. Exulting in the abasement of humanity, joying to witness the uttermost lengths to which man's folly would go, thou hast bidden thy lovers walk on all fours, and required of them their lands and wealth, nay, even their wives if they were worth aught to thee. Thou hast devoured millions of men without a cause; thou hast flung away lives like sand blown by the wind from west to east. Thou hast come down from the heights of thought to sit among the kings of men. Woman! instead of comforting men, thou hast tormented

and afflicted them! Knowing that thou couldst ask and have, thou hast demanded—blood! A little flour surely should have contented thee, accustomed as thou hadst been to live on bread and to mingle water with thy wine. Unlike all others in all things, formerly thou wouldst bid thy lovers fast, and they obeyed. Why should thy fancies have led thee to require things impossible? Why, like a courtesan spoiled by her lovers, hast thou doted on follies, and left those undeceived who sought to explain and justify all thy errors? Then came the days of thy later passions, terrible like the love of a woman of forty years, with a fierce cry thou hast sought to clasp the whole universe in one last embrace—and thy universe recoiled from thee!

"Then old men succeeded to thy young lovers; decrepitude came to thy feet and made thee hideous. Yet, even then, men with the eagle power of vision said to thee in a glance, 'Thou shalt perish ingloriously, because thou hast fallen away, because thou hast broken the vows of thy maidenhood. The angel with peace written on her forehead, who should have shed light and joy along her path, has been a Messalina, delighting in the circus, in debauchery, and abuse of power. The days of thy virginity cannot return; henceforward thou shalt be subject to a master. Thy hour has come; the hand of death is upon thee. Thy heirs believe that thou art rich; they will kill thee and find nothing. Yet try at least to fling away this raiment no longer in fashion; be once more as in the days of old!—Nay, thou art dead, and by thine own deed!'

"Is not this thy story?" I concluded with, "Decrepit, toothless, shivering crone, now forgotten, going thy ways without so much as a glance from passers-by! Why art thou still alive? What doest thou in that beggar's garb, uncomely and desired of none? Where are thy riches?—for what were they spent? Where are thy treasures?—what great deeds hast thou done?"

At this demand, the shriveled woman raised her bony form,

flung off her rags, and grew tall and radiant, smiling as she broke forth from the dark chrysalis sheath. Then, like a butterfly, this diaphanous creature emerged, fair and youthful, clothed in white linen, an Indian from creation issuing her palms. Her golden hair rippled over her shoulders, her eyes glowed, a bright mist clung about her, a ring of gold hovered above her head, she shook the flaming blade of a sword towards the spaces of heaven.

"See and believe!" she cried.

And suddenly I saw, afar off, many thousands of cathedrals like the one that I had just quitted; but these were covered with pictures and with frescoes, and I heard them echo with entrancing music. Myriads of human creatures flocked to these great buildings, swarming about them like ants on an ant-heap. Some were eager to rescue books from oblivion or to copy manuscripts, others were helping the poor, but nearly all were studying. Up above this countless multitude rose giant statues that they had erected in their midst, and by the gleams of a strange light from some luminary as powerful as the sun I read the inscriptions on the bases of the statues—Science, History, Literature.

The light died out. Again I faced the young girl. Gradually she slipped into the dreary sheath, into the ragged sear-cloths, and became an aged woman again. Her familiar brought her a little dust, and she stirred it into the ashes of her chafing-dish, for the weather was cold and stormy; and then he lighted for her, whose palaces had been lit with thousands of wax-tapers, a little cresset, that she might see to read her prayers through the hours of night.

"There is no faith left in the earth!" she said.

In such a perilous plight did I behold the fairest and the greatest, the truest and most life-giving of all powers.

"Wake up, sir, the doors are just about to be shut," said a hoarse voice. I turned and beheld the beadle's ugly counte-

nance; the man was shaking me by the arm, and the cathedral lay wrapped in shadows as a man is wrapped in his cloak.

"Belief," I said to myself, "is life! I have just witnessed the funeral of a monarchy, now we must defend the church."

PARIS, *February*, 1831.

MELMOTH RECONCILED.

(*Melmoth réconcilié.*)

To Monsieur le Général Baron de Pommereul, a token of the friendship between our fathers, which survives in their sons.

DE BALZAC.

THERE is a special variety of human nature obtained in the social kingdom by a process analogous to that of the gardener's craft in the vegetable kingdom, to wit, by the forcing-house—a species of hybrid which can be raised neither from seed nor from slips. This product is known as the cashier, an anthropomorphous growth, watered by religious doctrine, trained up in the fear of the guillotine, pruned by vice, to flourish on a third floor with an estimable wife by his side and an uninteresting family. The number of cashiers in Paris must always be a problem for the physiologist. Has any one as yet been able to state correctly the terms of the proportion sum wherein the cashier figures as the unknown x? Where will you find the man who shall live with wealth, like a cat with a caged mouse? This man, for further qualification, shall be capable of sitting boxed in behind an iron grating for seven or eight hours a day during seven-eighths of the year, perched upon a cane-seated chair in a space as narrow as a lieutenant's cabin on board a man-of-war. Such a man must be able to defy anchylosis of the knee and thigh joints; he must have a soul above meanness, in order to live meanly; must lose all relish for money by dint of handling it. Demand this peculiar specimen of any creed, educational system, school, or institution you please, and select Paris, that city of fiery ordeals and branch establishment of hell, as the soil in which to plant the

said cashier. So be it. Creeds, schools, institutions, and moral systems, all human rules and regulations, great and small, will, one after another, present much the same face that an intimate friend turns upon you when you ask him to lend you a thousand francs. With a dolorous dropping of the jaw, they indicate the guillotine, much as your friend aforesaid will furnish you with the address of the money-lender, pointing you to one of the hundred gates by which a man comes to the last refuge of the destitute.

Yet nature has her freaks in the making of a man's mind; she indulges herself and makes a few honest folk now and again, and now and then a cashier.

Wherefore, that race of corsairs whom we dignify with the title of bankers, the gentry who take out a license for which they pay a thousand crowns, as the privateer takes out his letters of marque, hold these rare products of the incubations of virtue in such esteem that they confine them in cages in their counting-houses, much as governments procure and maintain specimens of strange beasts at their own charges.

If the cashier is possessed of an imagination or of a fervid temperament; if, as will sometimes happen to the most complete cashier, he loves his wife, and that wife grows tired of her lot, has ambitions, or merely some vanity in her composition, the cashier is undone. Search the chronicles of the counting-house. You will not find a single instance of a cashier attaining *a position*, as it is called. They are sent to the hulks; they go to foreign parts; they vegetate on a second floor in the Rue Saint-Louis among the market gardens of the Marais. Some day, when the cashiers of Paris come to a sense of their real value, a cashier will be hardly obtainable for money. Still, certain it is that there are people who are fit for nothing but to be cashiers, just as the bent of a certain order of mind inevitably makes for rascality. But, oh marvel of our civilization! Society

rewards virtue with an income of a hundred louis in old age, a dwelling on a second floor, bread sufficient, occasional new bandana handkerchiefs, an elderly wife and her offspring.

So much for virtue. But for the opposite course, a little boldness, a faculty for keeping on the windward side of the law, as Turenne outflanked Montécuculli, and society will sanction the theft of millions, shower ribands upon the thief, cram him with honors, and smother him with consideration.

Government, moreover, works harmoniously with this profoundly illogical reasoner—society. Government levies a conscription on the young intelligence of the kingdom at the age of seventeen or eighteen, a conscription of precocious power. Great ability is prematurely exhausted by excessive brain-work before it is sent up to be submitted to a process of selection. Nurserymen sort and select seeds in much the same way. To this process the government brings professional appraisers of talent, men who can assay brains as experts assay gold at the Mint. Five hundred such heads, set afire with hope, are sent up annually by the most progressive portion of the population ; and of these the government takes one-third, puts them in sacks called the Écoles, and shakes them up together for three years. Though every one of these young plants represents vast productive power, they are made, as one may say, into cashiers. They receive appointments ; the rank and file of engineers is made up of them ; they are employed as captains of artillery ; there is no (subaltern) grade to which they may not aspire. Finally, when these men, the pick of the youth of the nation, fattened on mathematics and stuffed with knowledge, have attained the age of fifty years, they have their reward, and receive as the price of their services the third-floor lodging, the wife and family, and all the comforts that sweeten life for mediocrity. If from among this race of dupes there should escape some five or six men of

genius, who climb the highest heights, is it not very miraculous?

This is an exact statement of the relations between talent and probity on the one hand, and government and society on the other, in an age that considers itself to be progressive. Without this prefatory explanation a recent occurrence in Paris would seem improbable; but preceded by this summing up of the situation, it will perhaps receive some thoughtful attention from minds capable of recognizing the real plague-spots of our civilization, a civilization which since 1815 has been moved by the spirit of gain rather than by principles of honor.

About five o'clock, on a dull autumn afternoon, the cashier of one of the largest banks in Paris was still at his desk, working by the light of a lamp that had been lit for some time. In accordance with the use and wont of commerce, the counting-house was in the darkest corner of the low-ceiled and far from spacious mezzanine floor, and at the very end of a passage lighted only by borrowed lights. The office doors along this corridor, each with its label, gave the place the look of a bath-house. At four o'clock the stolid porter had proclaimed, according to his orders, "The bank is closed." And by this time the departments were deserted, the letters dispatched, the clerks had taken their leave. The wives of the partners in the firm were expecting their lovers; the two bankers dining with their mistresses. Everything was in order.

The place where the strong boxes had been bedded in sheet-iron was just behind the little sanctum, where the cashier was busy. Doubtless he was balancing his books. The open front gave a glimpse of a safe of hammered iron, so enormously heavy (thanks to the science of the modern inventor) that burglars could not carry it away. The door only opened at the pleasure of those who knew its password. The

letter-lock was a warden who kept its own secret and could not be bribed; the mysterious word was an ingenious realization of the "open sesame" in the "Arabian Nights." But even this was as nothing. A man might discover the password; but unless he knew the lock's final secret, the *ultima ratio* of this gold-guarding dragon of mechanical science, it discharged a blunderbuss at his head.

The door of the room, the walls of the room, the shutters of the windows in the room, the whole place, in fact, was lined with sheet-iron a third of an inch in thickness, concealed behind the thin wooden paneling. The shutters had been closed, the door had been shut. If ever man could feel confident that he was absolutely alone, and that there was no remote possibility of being watched by prying eyes, that man was the cashier of the house of Nucingen and Company, in the Rue Saint-Lazare.

Accordingly the deepest silence prevailed in that iron cage. The fire had died out in the stove, but the room was full of that tepid warmth which produces the dull heavy-headedness and nauseous queasiness of a morning after an orgy. The stove is a mesmerist that plays no small part in the reduction of bank clerks and porters to a state of idiocy.

A room with a stove in it is a retort in which the power of strong men is evaporated; where their vitality is exhausted, and their wills enfeebled. Government offices are part of a great scheme for the manufacture of the mediocrity necessary for the maintenance of a feudal system on a pecuniary basis—and money is the foundation of the social contract. (See *Les Employés.*) The mephitic vapors in the atmosphere of a crowded room contribute in no small degree to bring about a gradual deterioration of intelligences, the brain that gives off the largest quantity of nitrogen asphyxiates the others, in the long run.

The cashier was a man of five-and-forty or thereabouts. As he sat at the table, the light from a moderator lamp shining

full on his bald head and glistening fringe of iron-gray hair that surrounded it—this baldness and the round outlines of his face made his head look very like a ball. His complexion was brick-red, a few wrinkles had gathered about his eyes, but he had the smooth, plump hands of a stout man. His blue cloth coat, a little rubbed and worn, and the creases and shininess of his trousers, traces of hard wear that the clothes-brush fails to remove, would impress a superficial observer with the idea that here was a thrifty and upright human being, sufficient of the philosopher or of the aristocrat to wear shabby clothes. But, unluckily, it is easy to find penny-wise people who will prove weak, wasteful, or incompetent in the capital things of life.

The cashier wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honor at his button-hole, for he had been a major of dragoons in the time of the Emperor. M. de Nucingen, who had been a contractor before he became a banker, had had reason in those days to know the honorable disposition of his cashier, who then occupied a high position. Reverses of fortune had befallen the major, and the banker out of regard for him paid him five hundred francs a month. The soldier had become a cashier in the year 1813, after his recovery from a wound received at Studzianka during the retreat from Moscow, followed by six months of enforced idleness at Strasbourg, whither several officers had been transported by order of the Emperor, that they might receive skilled attention. This particular officer, Castanier by name, retired with the honorary grade of colonel, and a pension of two thousand four hundred francs.

In ten years' time the cashier had completely effaced the soldier, and Castanier inspired the banker with such trust in him that he was associated in the transactions that went on in the private office behind his little counting-house. The Baron himself had access to it by means of a secret staircase. There, matters of business were decided. It was the bolting-

room where proposals were sifted; the privy council chamber where the reports of the money market were analyzed; circular notes issued thence; and, finally, the private ledger and the journal which summarized the work of all the departments were kept there.

Castanier had gone himself to shut the door which opened on to a staircase that led to the parlor occupied by the two bankers on the first floor of their hotel. This done, he had sat down at his desk again, and for a moment he gazed at a little collection of letters of credit drawn on the firm of Watschildine, of London. Then he had taken up the pen and imitated the banker's signature upon each. *Nucingen* he wrote, and eyed the forged signatures critically to see which seemed the most perfect copy.

Suddenly he looked up as if a needle had pricked him. "You are not alone!" a boding voice seemed to cry in his heart; and indeed the forger saw a man standing at the little grated window of the counting-house, a man whose breathing was so noiseless that he did not seem to breathe at all. Castanier looked, and saw that the door at the end of the passage was wide open; the stranger must have entered by that way.

For the first time in his life the old soldier felt a sensation of dread that made him stare open-mouthed and wide-eyed at the man before him; and for that matter, the appearance of the apparition was sufficiently alarming even if unaccompanied by the mysterious circumstances of so sudden an entry. The rounded forehead, the harsh coloring of the long oval face, indicated quite as plainly as the cut of his clothes that the man was an Englishman, reeking of his native isles. You had only to look at the collar of his overcoat, at the voluminous cravat which smothered the crushed frills of a shirt front so white that it brought out the changeless leaden hue of an impassive face, and the thin red line of the lips that seemed made to suck the blood of corpses; and you could guess at once at the black gaiters buttoned up to the knee, and the half-

THE FORGER SAW A MAN STANDING AT THE LITTLE GRATED WINDOW.

puritanical costume of a wealthy Englishman dressed for a walking excursion. The intolerable glitter of the stranger's eyes produced a vivid and unpleasant impression, which was only deepened by the rigid outlines of his features. The dried-up, emaciated creature seemed to carry within him some gnawing thought that consumed him and could not be appeased.

He must have digested his food so rapidly that he could doubtless eat continually without bringing any trace of color into his face or features. A tun of Tokay *vin de succession* would not have caused any faltering in that piercing glance that read men's inmost thoughts, nor dethroned the merciless reasoning faculty that always seemed to go to the bottom of things. There was something of the fell and tranquil majesty of a tiger about him.

"I have come to cash this bill of exchange, sir," he said. Castanier felt the tones of his voice thrill through every nerve with a violent shock similar to that given by a discharge of electricity.

"The safe is closed," said Castanier, in the sententious tone so usual with bank officials.

"It is open," said the Englishman, looking round the counting-house. "To-morrow will be Sunday, and I cannot wait. The amount is for five hundred thousand francs. You have the money there, and I must have it."

"But how did you come in, sir?"

The Englishman smiled. That smile frightened Castanier. No words could have replied more fully nor more peremptorily than that scornful and imperial curl of the stranger's lips. Castanier turned away, took up fifty packets, each containing ten thousand francs in bank-notes, and held them out to the stranger, receiving in exchange for them a bill accepted by the Baron de Nucingen. A sort of convulsive tremor ran through him as he saw a red gleam in the stranger's eyes when they fell on the forged signature on the letter of credit.

"It wants your signature," stammered Castanier, handing back the bill.

"Hand me your pen," answered the Englishman.

Castanier handed him the pen with which he had just committed forgery. The stranger wrote *John Melmoth*, then he returned the slip of paper and the pen to the cashier. Castanier looked at the handwriting, noticing that it sloped from right to left in the Eastern fashion, and Melmoth disappeared so noiselessly that when Castanier looked up again an exclamation broke from him, partly because the man was no longer there, partly because he felt a strange painful sensation such as our imagination might take for an effect of poison.

The pen that Melmoth had handled sent the same sickening heat through him that an emetic produces. But it seemed impossible to Castanier that the Englishman should have guessed his crime. His inward qualms he attributed to the palpitation of the heart that, according to received ideas, was sure to follow at once on such a "turn" as the stranger had given him.

"The devil take it; I am very stupid. Providence is watching over me; for if that brute had come round to see my gentleman to-morrow, my goose would have been cooked!" said Castanier, and he burned the unsuccessful attempts at forgery in the stove.

He put the bill that he meant to take with him in an envelope, and helped himself to five hundred thousand francs in French and English bank-notes from the safe, which he locked. Then he put everything in order, lit a candle, blew out the lamp, took up his hat and umbrella, and went out sedately, as usual, to leave one of the two keys of the strong room with Madame de Nucingen, in the absence of her husband the Baron.

"You are in luck, M. Castanier," said the banker's wife as he entered her room; "we have a holiday on Monday; you can go into the country, or to Soizy."

"Madame, will you be so good as to tell your husband that the bill of exchange on Watschildine, which was behind time, has just been presented? The five hundred thousand francs have been paid; so I shall not come back till noon on Tuesday."

"Good-bye, monsieur; I hope you will have a pleasant time."

"The same to you, madame," replied the old dragoon as he went out. He glanced as he spoke at a young man well known in fashionable society at that time, a M. de Rastignac, who was regarded as Madame de Nucingen's lover.

"Madame," remarked this latter, "the old boy looks to me as if he meant to play you some ill turn."

"Pshaw! impossible; he is too stupid."

"Piquoizeau," said the cashier, walking into the porter's room, "what made you let anybody come up after four o'clock?"

"I have been smoking a pipe here in the doorway ever since four o'clock," said the man, "and nobody has gone into the bank. Nobody has come out either except the gentlemen——"

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, upon my word and honor. Stay, though, at four o'clock M. Werbrust's friend came, a young fellow from Messrs. du Tillet & Co., in the Rue Joubert."

"All right," said Castanier, and he hurried away.

The sickening sensation of heat that he had felt when he took back the pen returned in greater intensity. "*Mille diables!*" thought he, as he threaded his way along the Boulevard de Gand, "haven't I taken proper precautions? Let me think! Two clear days, Sunday and Monday, then a day of uncertainty before they begin to look for me, altogether, three days and four nights' respite. I have a couple of passports and two different disguises; is not that enough to

throw the cleverest detective off the scent? On Tuesday morning I shall draw a million francs in London before the slightest suspicion has been aroused. My debts I am leaving behind for the benefit of my creditors, who will put a 'P'* on the bills, and I shall live comfortably in Italy for the rest of my days as the Count Ferraro. I was alone with him when he died, poor fellow, in the marsh of Zembin, and I shall slip into his skin. *Mille diables!* the woman who is to follow after me might give them a clue! Think of an old campaigner like me infatuated enough to tie myself to a petticoat tail! Why take her? I must leave her behind. Yes, I could make up my mind to it; but—I know myself—I should be ass enough to go back for her. Still, nobody knows Aquilina. Shall I take her or leave her?"

"You will not take her!" cried a voice that filled Castanier with sickening dread. He turned sharply, and saw the Englishman.

"The devil is in it!" cried the cashier aloud.

Melmoth had passed his victim by this time; and if Castanier's first impulse had been to fasten a quarrel on a man who read his own thoughts, he was so much torn by opposing feelings that the immediate result was a temporary paralysis. When he resumed his walk he fell once more into that fever of irresolution which besets those who are so carried away by passion that they are ready to commit a crime, but have not sufficient strength of character to keep it to themselves without suffering terribly in the process. So, although Castanier had made up his mind to reap the fruits of a crime which was already half executed, he hesitated to carry out his designs. For him, as for many men of mixed character in whom weakness and strength are equally blended, the least trifling consideration determines whether they shall continue to lead blameless lives or become actively criminal. In the vast masses of men enrolled in Napoleon's armies there were many

* Protested.

who, like Castanier, possessed the purely physical courage demanded on the battlefield, yet lacked the moral courage which makes a man as great in crime as he could have been in virtue.

The letter of credit was drafted in such terms that immediately on his arrival he might draw twenty-five thousand pounds on the firm of Watschildine, the London correspondents of the house of Nucingen. The London house had been already advised of the draft about to be made upon them; he had written to them himself. He had instructed an agent (chosen at random) to take his passage in a vessel which was to leave Portsmouth with a wealthy English family on board, who were going to Italy, and the passage-money had been paid in the name of the Count Ferraro. The smallest details of the scheme had been thought out. He had arranged matters so as to divert the search that would be made for him into Belgium and Switzerland, while he himself was at sea in the English vessel. Then, by the time that Nucingen might flatter himself that he was on the track of his late cashier, the said cashier, as the Count Ferraro, hoped to be safe in Naples. He had determined to disfigure his face in order to disguise himself the more completely, and by means of an acid to imitate the scars of smallpox. Yet, in spite of all these precautions, which surely seemed as if they must secure him complete immunity, his conscience tormented him; he was afraid. The even and peaceful life that he had led for so long had modified the morality of the camp. His life was stainless as yet; he could not sully it without a pang. So for the last time he abandoned himself to all the influences of the better self that strenuously resisted.

"Pshaw!" he said at last, at the corner of the Boulevard and the Rue Montmartre, "I will take a cab after the play this evening and go out to Versailles. A postchaise will be ready for me at my old quartermaster's place. He would keep my secret even if a dozen men were standing ready to

shoot him down. The chances are all in my favor, so far as I can see; so I shall take my little Naqui with me, and I will go."

"You will not go!" exclaimed the Englishman, and the strange tones of his voice drove all the cashier's blood back to his heart.

Melmoth stepped into a tilbury which was waiting for him, and was whirled away so quickly that when Castanier looked up he saw his foe some hundred paces away from him, and before it even crossed his mind to cut off the man's retreat the tilbury was far on its way up the Boulevard Montmartre.

"Well, upon my word, there is something supernatural about this!" said he to himself. "If I were fool enough to believe in God, I should think that He had set Saint Michael on my tracks. Suppose that the devil and the police should let me go on as I please, so as to nab me in the nick of time? Did any one ever see the like! But there, this is folly——"

Castanier went along the Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre, slackening his pace as he neared the Rue Richer. There, on the second floor of a block of buildings which looked out upon some gardens, lived the unconscious cause of Castanier's crime—a young woman known in the quarter as Mme. de la Garde. A concise history of certain events in the cashier's past life must be given in order to explain these facts, and to give a complete presentment of the crisis when he yielded to temptation.

Mme. de la Garde said that she was a Piedmontese. No one, not even Castanier, knew her real name. She was one of those young girls who are driven by dire misery, by inability to earn a living, or by fear of starvation, to have recourse to a trade which most of them loathe, many regard with indifference, and some few follow in obedience to the laws of their constitution. But on the brink of the gulf of prostitution in Paris, the young girl of sixteen, beautiful and pure as the Madonna, had met with Castanier. The old

dragoon was too rough and homely to make his way in society, and he was tired of tramping the boulevard at night and of the kind of conquests made there by gold. For some time past he had desired to bring a certain regularity into an irregular life. He was struck by the beauty of the poor child who had drifted by chance into his arms, and his determination to rescue her from the life of the streets was half-benevolent, half-selfish, as some of the thoughts of the best of men are apt to be. Social conditions mingle elements of evil with the promptings of natural goodness of heart, and the mixture of motives underlying a man's intentions should be leniently judged. Castanier had just cleverness enough to be very shrewd where his own interests were concerned. So he concluded to be a philanthropist on either count, and at first made her his mistress.

"Hey! hey!" he said to himself, in his soldierly fashion, "I am an old wolf, and a sheep shall not make a fool of me. Castanier, old man, before you set up housekeeping, reconnoitre the girl's character for a bit, and see if she is a steady sort."

This irregular union gave the Piedmontese a status the most nearly approaching respectability among those which the world declines to recognize. During the first year she took the *nom de guerre* of Aquilina, one of the characters in *Venice Preserved*, which she had chanced to read. She fancied that she resembled the courtesan in face and general appearance, and in a certain precocity of heart and brain of which she was conscious. When Castanier found that her life was as well regulated and virtuous as was possible for a social outlaw, he manifested a desire that they should live as husband and wife. So she took the name of Mme. de la Garde, in order to approach, as closely as Parisian usages permit, the conditions of a real marriage. As a matter of fact, many of these unfortunate girls have one fixed idea, to be looked upon as respectable middle-class women, who lead humdrum lives of

faithfulness to their husbands; women who would make excellent mothers, keepers of household accounts, and menders of household linen. This longing springs from a sentiment so laudable that society should take it into consideration. But society, incorrigible as ever, will assuredly persist in regarding the married woman as a corvette duly authorized by her flag and papers to go on her own course, while the woman who is a wife in all but name is a pirate and an outlaw for lack of a document. A day came when Mme. de la Garde would fain have signed herself "Mme. Castanier." The cashier was put out by this.

"So you do not love me well enough to marry me?" she said.

Castanier did not answer; he was absorbed by his thoughts. The poor girl resigned herself to her fate. The ex-dragoon was in despair. Naqui's heart softened towards him at the sight of his trouble; she tried to soothe him, but what could she do when she did not know what ailed him? When Naqui made up her mind to know the secret, although she never asked him a question, the cashier dolefully confessed to the existence of a Mme. Castanier. This lawful wife, a thousand times accursed, was living in a humble way in Strasbourg on a small property there; he wrote to her twice a year, and kept the secret of her existence so well that no one suspected that he was married. The reason of this reticence? If it is familiar to many military men who may chance to be in a like predicament, it is perhaps worth while to give the story.

Your genuine trooper (if it is allowable here to employ the word which in the army signifies a man who is destined to die as a captain) is a sort of serf, a part and parcel of his regiment, an essentially simple creature, and Castanier was marked out by nature as a victim to the wiles of mothers with grown-up daughters left too long on their hands. It was at Nancy, during one of those brief intervals of repose when the Imperial armies were not on active service abroad, that

Castanier was so unlucky as to pay some attention to a young lady with whom he danced at a *ridotto*, the provincial name for the entertainments often given by the military to the townsfolk, or *vice versâ*, in garrison towns. A scheme for inveigling the gallant captain into matrimony was immediately set on foot, one of those schemes by which mothers secure accomplices in a human heart by touching all its motive springs, while they convert all their friends into fellow-conspirators.

Like all people possessed by one idea, these ladies press everything into the service of their great project, slowly elaborating their toils, much as the ant-lion excavates its funnel in the sand and lies in wait at the bottom for its victim. Suppose that no one strays, after all, into that carefully constructed labyrinth? Suppose that the ant-lion dies of hunger and thirst in her pit? Such things may be, but if any heedless creature once enters in, it never comes out. All the wires which could be pulled to induce action on the captain's part were tried; appeals were made to the secret interested motives that always come into play in such cases; they worked on Castanier's hopes and on the weaknesses and vanity of human nature. Unluckily, he had praised the daughter to her mother when he brought her back after a waltz, a little chat followed, and then an invitation in the most natural way in the world. Once introduced into the house, the dragoon was dazzled by the hospitality of a family who appeared to conceal their real wealth beneath a show of careful economy. He was skilfully flattered on all sides, and every one extolled for his benefit the various treasures there displayed. A neatly-timed dinner, served on plate loaned by an uncle, the attention shown to him by the only daughter of the house, the gossip of the town, a well-to-do sub-lieutenant who seemed likely to cut the ground from under his feet—all the innumerable snares, in short, of the provincial ant-lion were set for him, and to such good purpose, that Castanier

said five years later, "To this day I do not know how it came about!"

The dragoon received fifteen thousand francs with the lady, who, after two years of marriage, became the ugliest and consequently the most peevish woman on earth. Luckily they had no children. The fair complexion (maintained by a Spartan regimen), the fresh, bright color in her face, which spoke of an engaging modesty, became overspread with blotches and pimples; her figure, which had seemed so straight, grew crooked, the angel became a suspicious and shrewish creature who drove Castanier frantic. Then the fortune took to itself wings. At length the dragoon, no longer recognizing the woman whom he had wedded, left her to live on a little property at Strasbourg, until the time when it should please God to remove her to adorn paradise. She was one of those virtuous women who, for want of other occupation, would weary the life out of an angel with complainings, who pray till (if their prayers are heard in heaven) they must exhaust the patience of the Almighty, and say everything that is bad of their husbands in dove-like murmurs over a game of boston with their neighbors. When Aquilina learned all these troubles she clung still more affectionately to Castanier, and made him so happy, varying with woman's ingenuity the pleasures with which she filled his life, that all unwittingly she was the cause of the cashier's downfall.

Like many women who seem by nature destined to sound all the depths of love, Mme. de la Garde was disinterested. She asked neither for gold nor for jewelry, gave no thought to the future, lived entirely for the present and for the pleasures of the present. She accepted expensive ornaments and dresses, the carriage so eagerly coveted by women of her class, as one harmony the more in the picture of life. There was absolutely no vanity in her desire not to appear at a better advantage but to look the fairer, and, moreover, no woman could live without luxuries more cheerfully. When a man of

generous nature (and military men are mostly of this stamp) meets with such a woman, he feels a sort of exasperation at finding himself her debtor in generosity. He feels that he could stop a mail-coach to obtain money for her if he has not sufficient for her whims. He will commit a crime if so he may be great and noble in the eyes of some woman or of his special public; such is the nature of the man. Such a lover is like a gambler who would be dishonored in his own eyes if he did not repay the sum he borrowed from a waiter in a gaming-house; but will shrink from no crime, will leave his wife and children without a penny, and rob and murder, if so he may come to the gaming table with a full purse, and his honor remain untarnished among the frequenters of that fatal abode. So it was with Castanier.

He had begun by installing Aquilina in a modest fourth-floor dwelling, the furniture being of the simplest kind. But when he saw the girl's beauty and great qualities, when he had known inexpressible and unlooked-for happiness with her, he began to dote upon her, and longed to adorn his idol. Then Aquilina's toilet was so comically out of keeping with her poor abode, that for both their sakes it was clearly incumbent on him to move. The change swallowed up almost all Castanier's savings, for he furnished his domestic paradise with all the prodigality that is lavished on a kept mistress. A pretty woman must have everything pretty about her; the unity of charm in the woman and her surroundings singles her out from among her sex. This sentiment of homogeneity indeed, though it has frequently escaped the attention of observers, is instinctive in human nature; and the same prompting leads elderly spinsters to surround themselves with dreary relics of the past. But the lovely Piedmontese must have the newest and latest fashions, and all that was daintiest and prettiest in stuffs for hangings, in silks or jewelry, in fine china and other brittle and fragile wares. She asked for nothing; but when she was called upon to make a choice, when Castanier asked

her, "Which do you like?" she would answer, "Why, this is the nicest!" Love never counts the cost, and Castanier therefore always took the "nicest."

When once the standard had been set up, there was nothing for it but everything in the household must be in conformity, from the linen, plate, and crystal through a thousand and one items of expenditure down to the pots and pans in the kitchen. Castanier had meant to "do things simply," as the saying goes, but he gradually found himself more and more in debt. One expense entailed another. The clock called for candle sconces. Fires must be lighted in the ornamental grates, but the curtains and hangings were too fresh and delicate to be soiled by smuts, so they must be replaced by patent and elaborate fireplaces, warranted to give out no smoke, recent inventions of the people who are clever at drawing up a prospectus. Then Aquilina found it so nice to run about barefooted on the carpet in her room, that Castanier must have soft carpets laid everywhere for the pleasure of playing with Naqui. A bathroom, too, was built for her, everything to the end that she might be more comfortable.

Shopkeepers, workmen, and manufacturers in Paris have a mysterious knack of enlarging a hole in a man's purse. They cannot give the price of anything upon inquiry; and as the paroxysm of longing cannot abide delay, orders are given by the feeble light of an approximate estimate of cost. The same people never send in the bills at once, but ply the purchaser with furniture till his head spins. Everything is so pretty, so charming; and every one is satisfied.

A few months later the obliging furniture dealers are metamorphosed, and reappear in the shape of alarming totals on invoices that fill the soul with their horrid clamor; they are in urgent want of the money; they are, as you may say, on the brink of bankruptcy, their tears flow, it is heartrending to hear them! And then——the gulf yawns, and gives up serried columns of figures marching four deep, when, as a

matter of fact, they should have issued innocently three by three.

Before Castanier had any idea of how much he had spent, he had arranged for Aquilina to have a carriage from a livery stable when she went out, instead of a cab. Castanier was a gourmand; he engaged an excellent cook; and Aquilina, to please him, had herself made the purchases of early fruit and vegetables, rare delicacies, and exquisite wines. But, as Aquilina had nothing of her own, these gifts of hers, so precious by reason of the thought and tact and graciousness that prompted them, were no less a drain upon Castanier's purse; he did not like his Naqui to be without money, and Naqui could not keep money in her pocket. So the table was a heavy item of expenditure for a man with Castanier's income. The ex-dragoon was compelled to resort to various shifts for obtaining money, for he could not bring himself to renounce this delightful life. He loved the woman too well to cross the freaks of the mistress. He was one of those men who, through self-love or through weakness of character, can refuse nothing to a woman; false shame overpowers them, and they rather face ruin than make the admissions: "I cannot——" "My means will not permit——" "I cannot afford——"

When, therefore, Castanier saw that if he meant to emerge from the abyss of debt into which he had plunged, he must part with Aquilina and live upon bread and water, he was so unable to do without her or to change his habits of life that daily he put off his plans of reform until the morrow. The debts were pressing, and he began by borrowing money. His position and previous character inspired confidence, and of this he took advantage to devise a system of borrowing money as he required it. Then, as the total amount of debt rapidly increased, he had recourse to those commercial inventions known as *accommodation bills*. This form of bill does not represent goods or other value received, and the first

endorser pays the amount named for the obliging person who accepts it. This species of fraud is tolerated because it is impossible to detect it, and, moreover, it is an imaginary fraud which only becomes real if payment is ultimately refused.

When at length it was evidently impossible to borrow any longer, whether because the amount of the debt was now so greatly increased, or because Castanier was unable to pay the large amount of interest on the aforesaid sums of money, the cashier saw bankruptcy before him. On making this discovery, he decided for a fraudulent bankruptcy rather than an ordinary failure, and preferred a crime to a misdemeanor. He determined, after the fashion of the celebrated cashier of the Royal Treasury, to abuse the trust deservedly won, and to increase the number of his creditors by making a final loan of the sum sufficient to keep him in comfort in a foreign country for the rest of his days. All this, as has been seen, he had prepared to do.

Aquilina knew nothing of the irksome cares of this life; she enjoyed her existence, as many a woman does, making no inquiry as to where the money came from, even as sundry other folk will eat their buttered rolls untroubled by any restless spirit of curiosity as to the culture and growth of wheat; but as the labor and miscalculations of agriculture lie on the other side of the baker's oven, so, beneath the unappreciated luxury of many a Parisian household, lie intolerable anxieties and exorbitant toil.

While Castanier was enduring the torture of the strain, and his thoughts were full of the deed that should change his whole life, Aquilina was lying luxuriously back in a great armchair by the fireside, beguiling the time by chatting with her waiting-maid. As frequently happens in such cases, the maid had become the mistress' confidante, Jenny having first assured herself that her mistress' ascendency over Castanier was complete.

"What are we to do this evening? Léon seems determined to come," Mme. de la Garde was saying, as she read a passionate epistle indited upon a faint gray note-paper.

"Here is the master!" said Jenny.

Castanier came in. Aquilina, nowise disconcerted, crumpled up the letter, took it with the tongs, and held it in the flames.

"So that is what you do with your love-letters, is it?" asked Castanier.

"Oh, goodness, yes," said Aquilina; "is it not the best way of keeping them safe? Besides, fire should go to the fire, as water makes for the river."

"You are talking as if it were a real love-letter, Naqui——"

"Well, am I not handsome enough to receive them?" she said, holding up her forehead for a kiss. There was a carelessness in her manner that would have told any man less blind than Castanier that it was only a piece of conjugal duty, as it were, to give this joy to the cashier; but use and wont had brought Castanier to the point where clear-sightedness is no longer possible for love.

"I have taken a box at the Gymnase this evening," he said; "let us have dinner early, and then we need not dine in a hurry."

"Go and take Jenny. I am tired of plays. I do not know what is the matter with me this evening; I would rather stay here by the fire."

"Come, all the same though, Naqui; I shall not be here to bore you much longer. Yes, Naqui, I am going to start to-night, and it will be some time before I come back again. I am leaving everything in your charge. Will you keep your heart for me too?"

"Neither my heart nor anything else," she said; "but when you come back again, Naqui will still be Naqui for you."

"Well, this is frankness. So you would not follow me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Eh! why, how can I leave the lover who writes me such sweet little notes?" she asked, pointing to the blackened scrap of paper with a mocking smile.

"Is there any truth in it?" asked Castanier. "Have you really a lover?"

"Really!" cried Aquilina; "and have you never given it a serious thought, dear? To begin with, you are fifty years old. Then you have just the sort of face to put on a fruit stall; if the woman tried to sell you for a pumpkin, no one would contradict her. You puff and blow like a seal when you come upstairs; your paunch rises and falls like the diamond on a woman's forehead! It is pretty plain that you served in the dragoons! you are a very ugly-looking old man. Fiddle-de-dee. If you have any mind to keep my respect, I recommend you not to add imbecility to these qualities by imagining that such a girl as I am will be content with your asthmatic love, and not look for youth and good looks and pleasure by way of a variety——"

"Aquilina! you are laughing, of course?"

"Oh, very well; and are you not laughing too? Do you take me for a fool, telling me that you are going away? 'I am going to start to-night!' she said, mimicking his tones. Stuff and nonsense! Would you talk like that if you were really going away from your Naqui? You would cry, like the booby that you are!"

"After all, if I go, will you follow?" he asked.

"Tell me first whether this journey of yours is a bad joke or not."

"Yes, seriously, I am going."

"Well, then, seriously, I shall stay. A pleasant journey to you, my boy! I will wait till you come back. I would sooner take leave of life than take leave of my dear, cozy Paris——"

"Will you not come to Italy, to Naples, and lead a pleasant

life there—a delicious, luxurious life, with this stout old fogy of yours, who puffs and blows like a seal?"

"No."

"Ungrateful girl!"

"Ungrateful?" she cried, rising to her feet. "I might leave this house this moment and take nothing out of it but myself. I shall have given you all the treasures a young girl can give, and something that not every drop in your veins and mine can ever give me back. If, by any means whatever, by selling my hopes of eternity, for instance, I could recover my past self, body and soul (for I have, perhaps, redeemed my soul), and be pure as a lily for my lover, I would not hesitate a moment! What sort of devotion has rewarded mine? You have housed and fed me, just as you give a dog food and a kennel because he is a protection to the house, and he may take kicks when we are out of humor, and lick our hands as soon as we are pleased to call to him. And which of us two will have been the more generous?" she curtly asked Castanier in conclusion.

"Oh! dear child, do you not see that I am joking?" returned Castanier. "I am going on a short journey; I shall not be away for very long. But come with me to the Gymnase; I shall start just before midnight, after I have had time to say good-bye to you."

"Poor pet! so you are really going, are you?" she said. She put her arms round his neck, and drew down his head against her bodice.

"You are smothering me!" cried Castanier, with his face buried in Aquilina's breast. That damsel turned to say in Jenny's ear, "Go to Léon, and tell him not to come till one o'clock. If you do not find him, and he comes here during the leave-taking, keep him in your room. Well," she went on, setting free Castanier, and giving a tweak to the tip of his nose, "never mind, handsomest of seals that you are. I will go to the theatre with you this evening. But all in good

time; let us have dinner! There is a nice little dinner for you—just what you like."

"It is very hard to part from such a woman as you!" exclaimed Castanier.

"Very well then, why do you go?" asked she.

"Ah! why? why? If I were to begin to explain the reasons why, I must tell you things that would prove to you that I love you almost to madness. Ah! if you have sacrificed your honor for me, I have sold mine for you; we are quits. Is that love?"

"What is all this about?" said she. "Come, now, promise me that if I had a lover you would still love me as a father; that would be love! Come, now, promise it at once, and give us your fist upon it."

"I should kill you," and Castanier smiled as he spoke.

They sat down to the dinner table, and went thence to the Gymnase. When the first part of the performance was over, it occurred to Castanier to show himself to some of his acquaintances in the house, so as to turn away any suspicion of his departure. He left Mme. de la Garde in the corner box where she was seated, according to her modest wont, and went to walk up and down in the lobby. He had not gone many paces before he saw the Englishman, and with a sudden return of the sickening sensation of heat that once before had vibrated through him, and of the terror that he had felt already, he stood face to face with Melmoth.

"Forger!"

At the word, Castanier glanced round at the people who were moving about them. He fancied that he could see astonishment and curiosity in their eyes, and wishing to be rid of this Englishman at once, he raised his hand to strike him—and felt his arm paralyzed by some invisible power that sapped his strength and nailed him to the spot. He allowed the stranger to take him by the arm, and they walked together to the green-room like two friends.

"Who is strong enough to resist me?" said the Englishman, addressing him. "Do you not know that everything here on earth must obey me, that it is in my power to do everything? I read men's thoughts, I see the future, and I know the past. I am here, and I can be elsewhere also. Time and space and distance are nothing to me. The whole world is at my beck and call. I have the power of continual enjoyment and of giving joy. I can see through walls, discover hidden treasures, and fill my hands with them. Palaces arise at my nod, and my architect makes no mistakes. I can make all lands break forth into blossom, heap up their gold and precious stones, and surround myself with fair women and ever-new faces; everything is yielded up to my will. I could gamble on the Stock Exchange, and my speculations would be infallible; but a man who can find the hoards that misers have hidden in the earth need not trouble himself about stocks. Feel the strength of the hand that grasps you; poor wretch, doomed to shame! Try to bend the arm of iron! try to soften the adamantine heart! Fly from me if you dare! You would hear my voice in the depths of the caves that lie under the Seine; you might hide in the Catacombs, but would you not see me there? My voice could be heard through the sound of the thunder, my eyes shine as brightly as the sun, for I am the peer of Lucifer!"

Castanier heard the terrible words, and felt no protest nor contradiction within himself. He walked side by side with the Englishman, and had no power to leave him.

"You are mine; you have just committed a crime. I have found at last the mate whom I have sought. Have you a mind to learn your destiny? Aha! you came here to see a play, and you shall see a play—nay, two. Come. Present me to Mme. de la Garde as one of your best friends. Am I not your last hope of escape?"

Castanier, followed by the stranger, returned to his box, and, in accordance with the order he had just received, he

hastened to introduce Melmoth to Mme. de la Garde. Aquilina seemed to be not in the least surprised. The Englishman declined to take a seat in front, and Castanier was once more beside his mistress; the man's slightest wish must be obeyed. The last piece was about to begin, for, at that time, small theatres only gave three pieces. One of the actors had made the Gymnase the fashion, and that evening Perlet (the actor in question) was to play in a vaudeville called the *Le Comédien d'Etampes*, in which he filled four different parts.

When the curtain rose, the stranger stretched out his hand over the crowded house. Castanier's cry of terror died away, for the walls of his throat seemed glued together as Melmoth pointed to the stage, and the cashier knew that the play had been changed at the Englishman's desire.

He saw the strong-room at the bank; he saw the Baron de Nucingen in conference with a police-officer from the Prefecture, who was informing him of Castanier's conduct, explaining that the cashier had absconded with money taken from the safe, giving the history of the forged signature. The information was put in writing; the document signed and duly despatched to the Public Prosecutor.

"Are we in time, do you think?" asked Nucingen.

"Yes," said the agent of police; "he is at the Gymnase, and has no suspicion of anything."

Castanier fidgeted on his chair, and made as if he would leave the theatre, but Melmoth's hand lay on his shoulder, and he was obliged to sit and watch; the hideous power of the man produced an effect like that of nightmare, and he could not move a limb. Nay, the man himself was the nightmare; his presence weighed heavily on his victim like a poisoned atmosphere. When the wretched cashier turned to implore the Englishman's mercy, he met those blazing eyes that discharged electric currents, which pierced through him and transfixed him like darts of steel.

"What have I done to you?" he said, in his prostrate

helplessness, and he breathed hard like a stag at the water's edge. "What do you want of me?"

"Look!" cried Melmoth.

Castanier looked at the stage. The scene had been changed. The play seemed to be over, and Castanier beheld himself stepping from the carriage with Aquilina; but as he entered the courtyard of the house in the Rue Richer, the scene again was suddenly changed, and he saw his own house. Jenny was chatting by the fire in her mistress' room with a subaltern officer of a line regiment then stationed at Paris.

"He is going, is he?" said the sergeant, who seemed to belong to a family in easy circumstances; "I can be happy at my ease! I love Aquilina too well to allow her to belong to that old toad! I, myself, am going to marry Mme. de la Garde!" cried the sergeant.

"Old toad!" Castanier murmured piteously.

"Here come the master and mistress; hide yourself! Stay, get in here, Monsieur Léon," said Jenny. "The master won't stay here for very long."

Castanier watched the sergeant hide himself among Aquilina's gowns in her dressing-room. Almost immediately he himself appeared upon the scene, and took leave of his mistress, who made fun of him in "asides" to Jenny, while she uttered the sweetest and tenderest words in his ears. She wept with one side of her face, and laughed with the other. The audience called for an encore.

"Accursed creature!" cried Castanier from his box.

Aquilina was laughing till the tears came into her eyes.

"Goodness!" she cried, "how funny Perlet is as the Englishwoman! Why don't you laugh? Every one else in the house is laughing. Laugh, dear!" she said to Castanier.

Melmoth burst out laughing, and the unhappy cashier shuddered. The Englishman's laughter wrung his heart and tortured his brain; it was as if a surgeon had bored his skull with a red-hot iron.

"Laughing! are they laughing?" stammered Castanier.

He did not see the prim English lady whom Perlet was acting with such ludicrous effect, nor hear the English French that had filled the house with roars of laughter; instead of all this, he beheld himself hurrying from the Rue Richer, hailing a cab on the Boulevard, bargaining with the man to take him to Versailles. Then once more the scene changed. He recognized the sorry inn at the corner of the Rue de l'Orangerie and the Rue des Récollets, which was kept by his old quartermaster. It was two o'clock in the morning, the most perfect stillness prevailed, no one was there to watch his movements. The post-horses were put into the carriage (it came from a house in the Avenue de Paris in which an Englishman lived, and had been ordered in the foreigner's name to avoid raising suspicion). Castanier saw that he had his bills and his passports, stepped into the carriage, and set out. But at the barrier he saw two gendarmes lying in wait for the carriage. A cry of horror burst from him, but Melmoth gave him a glance, and again the sound died in his throat.

"Keep your eyes on the stage, and be quiet!" said the Englishman.

In another moment Castanier saw himself flung into prison at the Conciergerie; and in the fifth act of the drama, entitled "The Cashier," he saw himself, in three months' time, condemned to twenty years of penal servitude. Again a cry broke from him. He was exposed upon the Place du Palais-de-Justice, and the executioner branded him with a red-hot iron. Then came the last scene of all; among some sixty convicts in the prison yard of the Bicêtre, he was awaiting his turn to have the irons riveted on his limbs.

"Dear me! I cannot laugh any more?" said Aquilina. "You are very solemn, dear boy; what can be the matter? The gentleman has gone."

"A word with you, Castanier," said Melmoth when the

piece was at an end, and the attendant was fastening Mme. de la Garde's cloak.

The corridor was crowded, and escape impossible.

"Very well, what is it?"

"No human power can hinder you from taking Aquilina home, and going next to Versailles, there to be arrested."

"How so?"

"Because you are in a hand that will never relax its grasp," returned the Englishman.

Castanier longed for the power to utter some word that should blot him out from among living men and hide him in the lowest depths of hell.

"Suppose that the devil were to make a bid for your soul, would you not give it to him now in exchange for the power of God? One single word, and those five hundred thousand francs shall be back in the Baron de Nucingen's safe; then you can tear up your letter of credit, and all traces of your crime will be obliterated. Moreover, you would have gold in torrents. You hardly believe in anything perhaps? Well, if all this comes to pass, you will believe at least in the devil."

"If it were only possible!" said Castanier joyfully.

"The man who can do it all gives you his word that it is possible," answered the Englishman.

Melmoth, Castanier, and Mme. de la Garde were standing out in the Boulevard when Melmoth raised his arm. A drizzling rain was falling, the streets were muddy, the air was close, there was thick darkness overhead; but in a moment, as the arm was outstretched, Paris was filled with sunlight; it was high noon on a bright July day. The trees were covered with leaves; a double stream of joyous holiday makers strolled beneath them. Sellers of licorice water shouted their cool drinks. Splendid carriages rolled past along the streets. A cry of terror broke from the cashier, and at that cry rain and darkness once more settled down upon the Boulevard.

Mme. de la Garde had stepped into the carriage. "Do be quick, dear!" she cried, "either come in or stay out. Really you are as dull as ditch water this evening——"

"What must I do?" Castanier asked of Melmoth.

"Would you like to take my place?" inquired the Englishman.

"Yes."

"Very well, then; I will be at your house in a few moments."

"By the by, Castanier, you are rather off your balance?" Aquilina remarked. "There is some mischief brewing; you were quite melancholy and thoughtful all through the play. Do you want anything that I can give you, dear? Tell me?"

"I am waiting till we are at home to know whether you love me."

"You need not wait till then," she said, throwing her arms round his neck. "There!" she said, as she embraced him, passionately to all appearance, and plied him with the coaxing caresses that are part of the business of such a life as hers, like stage action for an actress.

"Where is the music?" asked Castanier.

"What next? Only think of your hearing music now!"

"Heavenly music!" he went on. "The sounds seem to come from above."

"What? You have always refused to give me a box at the Italiens because you could not abide music, and are you turning music-mad at this time of day? Mad—that you are! The music is inside your own noddle, old addle-pate!" she went on, as she took his head in her hands and rocked it to and fro on her shoulder. "Tell me now, old man; isn't it the creaking of the wheels that sings in your ears?"

"Just listen, Naqui! If the angels make music for God Almighty, it must be such music as this that I am drinking in at every pore, rather than hearing. I do not know how to tell you about it; it is as sweet as honey-water!"

"Why, of course, they have music in heaven, for the angels in all the pictures have harps in their hands. He is mad, upon my word!" she said to herself, as she saw Castanier's attitude; he looked like an opium-eater in a blissful trance.

They reached the house. Castanier, absorbed by the thought of all that he had just heard and seen, knew not whether to believe it or no; he was like a drunken man, and utterly unable to think connectedly. He came to himself in Aquilina's room, whither he had been supported by the united efforts of his mistress, the porter, and Jenny; for he had fainted as he stepped from the carriage.

"*He* will be here directly! Oh, my friends, my friends!" he cried, and he flung himself despairingly into the depths of a low chair beside the fire.

Jenny heard the bell as he spoke, and admitted the Englishman. She announced that "a gentleman had come who had made an appointment with the master," when Melmoth suddenly appeared, and deep silence followed. He looked at the porter—the porter went; he looked at Jenny—and Jenny went likewise.

"Madame," said Melmoth, turning to Aquilina, "with your permission, we will conclude a piece of urgent business."

He took Castanier's hand, and Castanier rose, and the two men went into the drawing-room. There was no light in the room, but Melmoth's eyes lit up the thickest darkness. The gaze of those strange eyes had left Aquilina like one spellbound; she was helpless, unable to take any thought for her lover; moreover, she believed him to be safe in Jenny's room, whereas their early return had taken the waiting-woman by surprise, and she had hidden the officer in the dressing-room. It had all happened exactly as in the drama that Melmoth had displayed for his victim. Presently the house-door was slammed violently, and Castanier reappeared.

"What ails you?" cried the horror-struck Aquilina.

There was a change in the cashier's appearance. A strange

pallor overspread his once rubicund countenance; it wore the peculiarly sinister and stony look of the mysterious visitor. The sullen glare of his eyes was intolerable, the fierce light in them seemed to scorch. The man who had looked so good-humored and good-natured had suddenly grown tyrannical and proud. The courtesan thought that Castanier had grown thinner; there was a terrible majesty in his brow; it was as if a dragon breathed forth a malignant influence that weighed upon the others like a close, heavy atmosphere. For a moment Aquilina knew not what to do.

"What passed between you and that diabolical-looking man in those few minutes?" she asked at length.

"I have sold my soul to him. I feel it; I am no longer the same. He has taken my *self*, and given me his soul in exchange."

"What?"

"You would not understand it at all——Ah! he was right," Castanier went on, "the fiend was right! I see everything and know all things. You have been deceiving me!"

Aquilina turned cold with terror. Castanier lighted a candle and went into the dressing-room. The unhappy girl followed him in dazed bewilderment, and great was her astonishment when Castanier drew the dresses that hung there aside and disclosed the sergeant.

"Come out, my boy," said the cashier; and, taking Léon by a button of his overcoat, he drew the officer into his room.

The Piedmontese, haggard and desperate, had flung herself into her easy-chair. Castanier seated himself on a sofa by the fire, and left Aquilina's lover in a standing position.

"You have been in the army," said Léon; "I am ready to give you satisfaction."

"You are a fool," said Castanier drily. "I have no occasion to fight. I could kill you by a look if I had any mind to do it. I will tell you what it is, youngster; why should I kill you? I can see a red line round your neck—the guillo-

tine is waiting for you. Yes, you will end in the Place de Grève. You are the headsman's property! there is no escape for you. You belong to a *vendita* of the Carbonari. You are plotting against the government."

"You did not tell me that," cried the Piedmontese, turning to Léon.

"So you do not know that the Minister decided this morning to put down your society?" the cashier continued. "The Procureur-Général has a list of your names. You have been betrayed. They are busy drawing up the indictment at this moment."

"Then was it you who betrayed him?" cried Aquilina, and with a hoarse sound in her throat like the growl of a tigress she rose to her feet; she seemed as if she would tear Castanier in pieces.

"You know me too well to believe it," Castanier retorted. Aquilina was benumbed by his coolness.

"Then how did you know it?" she murmured.

"I did not know it until I went into the drawing-room; now I know it—now I see and know all things, and can do all things."

The sergeant was overcome with amazement.

"Very well then, save him, save him, dear!" cried the girl, flinging herself at Castanier's feet. "If nothing is impossible to you, save him! I will love you, I will adore you, I will be your slave and not your mistress. I will obey your wildest whims; you shall do as you will with me. Yes, yes, I will give you more than love; you shall have a daughter's devotion as well as——Rodolphe! why will you not understand! After all, however violent my passions may be, I shall be yours for ever! What should I say to persuade you? I will invent pleasures——I——Great heavens! one moment! whatever you shall ask of me—to fling myself from the window, for instance—you will need to say but one word, 'Léon!' and I will plunge down into hell. I would bear

any torture, any pain of body or soul, anything you might inflict upon me!"

Castanier heard her with indifference. For all answer, he indicated Léon to her with a fiendish laugh.

"The guillotine is waiting for him," he repeated.

"No, no, no! He shall not leave this house. I will save him!" she cried. "Yes; I will kill any one who lays a finger upon him! Why will you not save him?" she shrieked aloud; her eyes were blazing, her hair unbound. "Can you save him?"

"I can do everything."

"Why do you not save him?"

"Why?" shouted Castanier, and his voice made the ceiling ring. "Eh! it is my revenge! Doing evil is my trade!"

"Die?" said Aquilina; "must he die, my lover. Is it possible?"

She sprang up and snatched a stiletto from a basket that stood on the chest of drawers and went to Castanier, who began to laugh.

"You know very well that steel cannot hurt me now——"

Aquilina's arm suddenly dropped like a snapped harp string.

"Out with you, my good friend," said the cashier, turning to the sergeant, "and go about your business."

He held out his hand; the other felt Castanier's superior power, and could not choose but obey.

"This house is mine. I could send for the commissary of police if I chose, and give you up as a man who has hidden himself on my premises, but I would rather let you go; I am a fiend, I am not a spy."

"I shall follow him!" said Aquilina.

"Then follow him," returned Castanier. "Here, Jenny ——"

Jenny appeared.

"Tell the porter to hail a cab for them. Here, Naqui," said Castanier, drawing a bundle of bank-notes from his

pocket; "you shall not go away like a pauper from a man who loves you still."

He held out three hundred thousand francs. Aquilina took the notes, flung them on the floor, spat on them, and trampled upon them in a frenzy of despair.

"We will leave this house on foot," she cried, "without a farthing of your money. Jenny, stay where you are."

"Good-evening!" answered the cashier, as he gathered up the notes again. "I have come back from my journey. Jenny," he added, looking at the bewildered waiting-maid, "you seem to me to be a good sort of girl. You have no mistress now. Come here. This evening you shall have a master."

Aquilina, who felt safe nowhere, went at once with the sergeant to the house of one of her friends. But all Léon's movements were suspiciously watched by the police, and after a time he and three of his friends were arrested. The whole story may be found in the newspapers of that day.

Castanier felt that he had undergone a mental as well as a physical transformation. The Castanier of old no longer existed—the boy, the young Lothario, the soldier who had proved his courage, who had been tricked into a marriage and disillusioned, the cashier, the passionate lover who had committed a crime for Aquilina's sake. His inmost nature had suddenly asserted itself. His brain had expanded, his senses had developed. His thoughts comprehended the whole world; he saw all the things of earth as if he had been raised to some high pinnacle above the world.

Until that evening at the play he had loved Aquilina to distraction. Rather than give her up he would have shut his eyes to her infidelities; and now all that blind passion had passed away as a cloud vanishes in the sunlight.

Jenny was delighted to succeed to her mistress' position and fortune, and did the cashier's will in all things; but

Castanier, who could read the inmost thoughts of the soul, discovered the real motive underlying this purely physical devotion. He amused himself with her, however, like a mischievous child who greedily sucks the juice of the cherry and flings away the stone. The next morning at breakfast-time, when she was fully convinced that she was a lady and the mistress of the house, Castanier uttered one by one the thoughts that filled her mind as she drank her coffee.

"Do you know what you are thinking, child?" he said, smiling, "I will tell you: 'So all that lovely rosewood furniture that I coveted so much, and the pretty dresses that I used to try on, are mine now! All on easy terms that madame refused, I do not know why. My word! if I might drive about in a carriage, have jewels and pretty things, a box at the theatre, and put something by! with me he should lead a life of pleasure fit to kill him if he were not as strong as a Turk! I never saw such a man!' Was not that just what you were thinking," he went on, and something in his voice made Jenny turn pale. "Well, yes, child; you could not stand it, and I am sending you away for your own good; you would perish in the attempt. Come, let us part good friends," and he coolly dismissed her with a very small sum of money.

The first use that Castanier had promised himself that he would make of the terrible power bought at the price of his eternal happiness was the full and complete indulgence of all his tastes.

He first put his affairs in order, readily settled his account with M. de Nucingen, who found a worthy German to succeed him, and then determined on a carouse worthy of the palmiest days of the Roman Empire. He plunged into dissipation as recklessly as Belshazzar of old went to that last feast in Babylon. Like Belshazzar, he saw clearly through his revels a gleaming hand that traced his doom in letters of flame, not on the narrow walls of the banqueting-chamber, but over the vast spaces of heaven that the rainbow spans. His feast was

not, indeed, an orgy confined within the limits of a banquet, for he squandered all the powers of soul and body in exhausting all the pleasures of earth. The table was in some sort earth itself, the earth that trembled beneath his feet. His was the last festival of the reckless spendthrift who has thrown all prudence to the winds. The devil had given him the key of the storehouse of human pleasures; he had filled and refilled his hands, and he was fast nearing the bottom. In a moment he had felt all that that enormous power could accomplish; in a moment he had exercised it, proved it, wearied of it. What had hitherto been the sum of human desires became as nothing. So often it happens that with possession the vast poetry of desire must end, and the thing possessed is seldom the thing that we dreamed of.

Beneath Melmoth's omnipotence lurked this tragical anticlimax of so many a passion, and now the inanity of human nature was revealed to his successor, to whom infinite power brought nothingness as a dowry.

To come to a clear understanding of Castanier's strange position, it must be borne in mind how suddenly these revolutions of thought and feeling had been wrought; how quickly they had succeeded each other; and of these things it is hard to give any idea to those who have never broken the prison bonds of time, and space, and distance. His relation to the world without had been entirely changed with the expansion of his faculties.

Like Melmoth himself, Castanier could travel in a few moments over the fertile plains of India, could soar on the wings of demons above African desert spaces, or skim the surface of the seas. The same insight that could read the inmost thoughts of others could apprehend at a glance the nature of any material object, just as he caught as it were all flavors at once upon his tongue. He took his pleasure like a despot; a blow of the axe felled the tree that he might eat its fruits. The transitions, the alternations that measure joy and pain, and

diversify human happiness, no longer existed for him. He had so completely glutted his appetites that pleasure must overpass the limits of pleasure to tickle a palate cloyed with satiety, and suddenly grown fastidious beyond all measure, so that ordinary pleasures became distasteful. Conscious that at will he was the master of all the women that he could desire, knowing that his power was irresistible, he did not care to exercise it; they were pliant to his unexpressed wishes, to his most extravagant caprices, until he felt a horrible thirst for love, and would have love beyond their power to give.

The world refused him nothing save faith and prayer, the soothing and consoling love that is not of this world. He was obeyed—it was a horrible position.

The torrents of pain, and pleasure, and thought that shook his soul and his bodily frame would have overwhelmed the strongest human being; but in him there was a power of vitality proportioned to the power of the sensations that assailed him. He felt within him a vague immensity of longing that earth could not satisfy. He spent his days on outspread wings, longing to traverse the luminous fields of space to other spheres that he knew afar by intuitive perception, a clear and hopeless knowledge. His soul dried up within him, for he hungered and thirsted after things that can neither be drunk nor eaten, but for which he could not choose but crave. His lips, like Melmoth's, burned with desire; he panted for the unknown, for he knew all things.

The mechanism and the scheme of the world was apparent to him, and its working interested him no longer; he did not long disguise the profound scorn that makes of a man of extraordinary powers a sphinx who knows everything and says nothing, and sees all things with an unmoved countenance. He felt not the slightest wish to communicate his knowledge to other men. He was rich with all the wealth of the world, with one effort he could make the circle of the globe, and riches and power were meaningless for him. He felt the

awful melancholy of omnipotence, a melancholy which Satan and God relieve by the exercise of infinite power in mysterious ways known to them alone. Castanier had not, like his master, the inextinguishable energy of hate and malice; he felt that he was a devil, but a devil whose time was not yet come, while Satan is a devil through all eternity, and being damned beyond redemption delights to stir up the world, like a dung-heap, with his triple fork and to thwart therein the designs of God. But Castanier, for his misfortune, had one hope left.

If in a moment he could move from one pole to the other as a bird springs restlessly from side to side in its cage, when, like the bird, he had crossed his prison, he saw the vast immensity of space beyond it. That vision of the Infinite left him for ever unable to see humanity and its affairs as other men saw them. The insensate fools who long for the power of the devil gauge its desirability from a human standpoint; they do not see that with the devil's power they will likewise assume his thoughts, and that they will be doomed to remain as men among creatures who will no longer understand them. The Nero unknown to history who dreams of setting Paris on fire for his private entertainment, like an exhibition of a burning house on the boards of a theatre, does not suspect that, if he had that power, Paris would become for him as little interesting as an ant-heap by the roadside to a hurrying passer-by. The circle of the sciences was for Castanier something like a logogriph for a man who does not know the key to it. Kings and governments were despicable in his eyes. His great debauch had been in some sort a deplorable farewell to his life as a man. The earth had grown too narrow for him, for the infernal gifts laid bare for him the secrets of creation—he saw the cause and foresaw its end. He was shut out from all that men call "heaven" in all languages under the sun; he could no longer think of heaven.

Then he came to understand the look on his predecessor's

face and the drying up of the life within; then he knew all that was meant by the baffled hope that gleamed in Melmoth's eyes; he, too, knew the thirst that burned those red lips, and the agony of a continual struggle between two natures grown to giant size. Even yet he might be an angel, and he knew himself to be a fiend. His was the fate of a sweet and gentle creature that a wizard's malice has imprisoned in a misshapen form, entrapping it by a pact, so that another's will must set it free from its detested envelope.

As a deception only increases the ardor with which a man of really great nature explores the infinite of sentiment in a woman's heart, so Castanier awoke to find that one idea lay like a weight upon his soul, an idea which was perhaps the key to loftier spheres. The very fact that he had bartered away his eternal happiness led him to dwell in thought upon the future of those who pray and believe. On the morrow of his debauch, when he entered into the sober possession of his power, this idea made him feel himself a prisoner; he knew the burden of the woe that poets, and prophets, and great oracles of faith have set forth for us in such mighty words; he felt the point of the flaming sword plunged into his side, and hurried in search of Melmoth. What had become of his predecessor?

The Englishman was living in a mansion in the Rue Férou, near Saint-Sulpice—a gloomy, dark, damp, and cold abode. The Rue Férou itself is one of the most dismal streets in Paris; it has a r orth aspect like all the streets that lie at right angles to the left bank of the Seine, and the houses are in keeping with the site. As Castanier stood on the threshold he found that the door itself, like the vaulted roof, was hung with black; rows of lighted tapers shone brilliantly as though some king were lying in state; and a priest stood on either side of a catafalque that had been raised there.

"There is no need to ask why you have come, sir," the old hall porter said to Castanier; "you are so like our poor

dear master that is gone. But if you are his brother, you have come too late to bid him good-bye. The good gentleman died the night before last."

"How did he die?" Castanier asked of one of the priests.

"Set your mind at rest," said an old priest; he partly raised as he spoke the black pall that covered the catafalque.

Castanier, looking at him, saw one of those faces that faith has made sublime; the soul seemed to shine forth from every line of it, bringing light and warmth for other men, kindled by the unfailing charity within. This was Sir John Melmoth's confessor.

"Your brother made an end that men may envy, and that must rejoice the angels. Do you know what joy there is in heaven over a sinner that repents? His tears of penitence, excited by grace, flowed without ceasing; death alone checked them. The Holy Spirit dwelt in him. His burning words, full of lively faith, were worthy of the Prophet-King. If, in the course of my life, I have never heard a more dreadful confession than from the lips of this English gentleman, I have likewise never heard such fervent and passionate prayers. However great the measures of his sins may have been, his repentance has filled the abyss to overflowing. The hand of God was visibly stretched out above him, for he was completely changed, there was such heavenly beauty in his face. The hard eyes were softened by tears; the resonant voice that struck terror into those who heard it took the tender and compassionate tones of those who themselves have passed through deep humiliation. He so edified those who heard his words that some who had felt drawn to see the spectacle of a Christian's death fell on their knees as he spoke of heavenly things, and of the infinite glory of God, and gave thanks and praise to Him. If he is leaving no worldly wealth to his family, no family can possess a greater blessing than this that he surely gained for them, a soul among the blessed, who will watch over you all and direct you in the path to heaven."

These words made such a vivid impression upon Castanier that he instantly hurried from the house to the Church of Saint-Sulpice, obeying what might be called a decree of fate. Melmoth's repentance had stupefied him.

At that time, on certain mornings in the week, a preacher, famed for his eloquence, was wont to hold conferences, in the course of which he demonstrated the truths of the Catholic faith for the youth of a generation proclaimed to be indifferent in matters of belief by another voice no less eloquent than his own. The conference had been put off to a later hour on account of Melmoth's funeral, so Castanier arrived just as the great preacher was epitomizing the proofs of a future existence of happiness with all the charm of eloquence and force of expression which have made him famous. The seeds of divine doctrine fell into a soil prepared for them in the old dragoon, into whom the devil had glided. Indeed, if there is a phenomenon well attested by experience, is it not the spiritual phenomenon commonly called the "faith of the peasant?" The strength of belief varies inversely with the amount of use that a man has made of his reasoning faculties. Simple people and soldiers belong to the unreasoning class. Those who have marched through life beneath the banner of instinct are far more ready to receive the light than minds and hearts overwearied with the world's sophistries.

Castanier had a southern temperament; he had joined the army as a lad of sixteen, and had followed the French flag till he was nearly forty years old. As a common trooper, he had fought day and night, and day after day, and, as in duty bound, had thought of his horse first, and of himself afterwards. While he served his military apprenticeship, therefore, he had but little leisure in which to reflect on the destiny of man, and when he became an officer he had his men to think of. He had been swept from battlefield to battlefield, but he had never thought of what comes after death. A soldier's life does not demand much thinking. Those who

cannot understand the lofty political ends involved and the interests of nation and nation; who cannot grasp political schemes as well as plans of campaign, and combine the science of the tactician with that of the administrator, are bound to live in a state of ignorance; the most boorish peasant in the most backward district in France is scarcely in a worse case. Such men as these bear the brunt of war, yield passive obedience to the brain that directs them, and strike down the men opposed to them as the woodcutter fells timber in the forest. Violent physical exertion is succeeded by times of inertia, when they repair the waste. They fight and drink, fight and eat, fight and sleep, that they may the better deal hard blows; the powers of the mind are not greatly exercised in this turbulent round of existence, and the character is as simple as heretofore.

When the men who have shown such energy on the battle-field return to ordinary civilization, most of those who have not risen to high rank seem to have acquired no ideas, and to have no aptitude, no capacity, for grasping new ideas. To the utter amazement of a younger generation, those who made our armies so glorious and so terrible are as simple as children, and as slow-witted as a clerk at his worst, and the captain of a thundering squadron is scarcely fit to keep a merchant's day-book. Old soldiers of this stamp, therefore, being innocent of any attempt to use their reasoning faculties, act upon their strongest impulses. Castanier's crime was one of those matters that raise so many questions, that, in order to debate about it, a moralist might call for its "discussion by clauses," to make use of a parliamentary expression.

Passion had counseled the crime; the cruelly irresistible power of feminine witchery had driven him to commit it; no man can say of himself, "I will never do that," when a siren joins in the combat and throws her spells over him.

So the word of life fell upon a conscience newly awakened to the truths of religion which the French Revolution and a

soldier's career had forced Castanier to neglect. The solemn words, "You will be happy or miserable for all eternity!" made but the more terrible impression upon him, because he had exhausted earth and shaken it like a barren tree; because his desires could effect all things, so that it was enough that any spot in earth or heaven should be forbidden him, and he forthwith thought of nothing else. If it were allowable to compare such great things with social follies, Castanier's position was not unlike that of a banker who, finding that his all-powerful millions cannot obtain for him an entrance into the society of the noblesse, must set his heart upon entering that circle, and all the social privileges that he has already acquired are as nothing in his eyes from the moment when he discovers that a single one is lacking.

Here was a man more powerful than all the kings on earth put together; a man who, like Satan, could wrestle with God Himself; leaning against one of the pillars in the Church of Saint-Sulpice, weighed down by the feelings and thoughts that oppressed him, and absorbed in the thought of a future, the same thought that had engulfed Melmoth.

"He was very happy, was Melmoth!" cried Castanier. "He died in the certain knowledge that he would go to heaven."

In a moment the greatest possible change had been wrought in the cashier's ideas. For several days he had been a devil, now he was nothing but a man; an image of the fallen Adam, of the sacred tradition embodied in all cosmogonies. But while he had thus shrunk to man's estate he retained a germ of greatness, he had been steeped in the Infinite. The power of hell had revealed the divine power. He thirsted for heaven as he had never thirsted after the pleasures of earth, that are so soon exhausted. The enjoyments which the fiend promises are but the enjoyments of earth on a larger scale, but to the joys of heaven there is no limit. He believed in God, and the spell that gave him the treasures of the world was as

nothing to him now; the treasures themselves seemed to him as contemptible as pebbles to an admirer of diamonds; they were but gewgaws compared with the eternal glories of the other life. A curse lay, he thought, on all things that came to him from this source. He sounded dark depths of painful thought as he listened to the service performed for Melmoth. The *Dies iræ* filled him with awe; he felt all the grandeur of that cry of a repentant soul trembling before the throne of God. The Holy Spirit, like a devouring flame, passed through him as fire consumes straw.

The tears were falling from his eyes when—"Are you a relation of the dead?" the beadle asked him.

"I am his heir," Castanier answered.

"Give something for the expenses of the services!" cried the man.

"No," said the cashier. (The devil's money should not go to the church.)

"For the poor!"

"No."

"For repairing the church!"

"No."

"The Lady Chapel!"

"No."

"For the schools!"

"No."

Castanier went, not caring to expose himself to the sour looks that the irritated functionaries gave him.

Outside, in the street, he looked up at the Church of Saint-Sulpice. "What made people build the giant cathedrals I have seen in every country?" he asked himself. "The feeling shared so widely throughout all time must surely be based upon something."

"Something! Do you call God *something?*" cried his conscience. "God! God! God!——"

The word was echoed and re-echoed by an inner voice, till

it overwhelmed him; but his feeling of terror subsided as he heard sweet distant sounds of music that he had caught faintly before. They were singing in the church, he thought, and his eyes scanned the great doorway. But as he listened more closely, the sounds poured upon him from all sides; he looked round the square, but there was no sign of any musicians. The melody brought visions of a distant heaven and far-off gleams of hope; but it also quickened the remorse that had set the lost soul in a ferment. He went on his way through Paris, walking as men walk who are crushed beneath the burden of their sorrow, seeing everything with unseeing eyes, loitering like an idler, stopping without cause, muttering to himself, careless of the traffic, making no effort to avoid a blow from a plank of timber.

Imperceptibly repentance brought him under the influence of the divine grace that soothes while it bruises the heart so terribly. His face came to wear a look of Melmoth, something great, with a trace of madness in the greatness. A look of dull and hopeless distress, mingled with the excited eagerness of hope, and, beneath it all, a gnawing sense of loathing for all that the world can give. The humblest of prayers lurked in the eyes that saw with such dreadful clearness. His power was the measure of his anguish. His body was bowed down by the fearful storm that shook his soul, as the tall pines bend before the blast. Like his predecessor, he could not refuse to bear the burden of life; he was afraid to die while he bore the yoke of hell. The torment grew intolerable.

At last, one morning, he bethought himself how that Melmoth (now among the blessed) had made the proposal of an exchange, and how that he had accepted it; others, doubtless, would follow his example; for in an age proclaimed, by the inheritors of the eloquence of the Fathers of the Church, to be fatally indifferent to religion, it should be easy to find a man who would accept the conditions of the contract in order to prove its advantages.

"There is one place where you can learn what kings will fetch in the market; where nations are weighed in the balance and systems appraised; where the value of a government is stated in terms of the five-franc piece; where ideas and beliefs have their price, and everything is discounted; where God Himself, in a manner, borrows on the security of His revenue of souls, for the Pope has a running account there. Is it not there that I should go to traffic in souls?"

Castanier went quite joyously on 'Change, thinking that it would be as easy to buy a soul as to invest money in the "Funds." Any ordinary person would have feared ridicule, but Castanier knew by experience that a desperate man takes everything seriously. A prisoner lying under sentence of death would listen to the madman who should tell him that by pronouncing some gibberish he could escape through the keyhole; for suffering is credulous, and clings to an idea until it fails, as the swimmer borne along by the current clings to the branch that snaps in his hand.

Towards four o'clock that afternoon Castanier appeared among the little knots of men who were transacting private business after 'Change. He was personally known to some of the brokers; and while affecting to be in search of an acquaintance, he managed to pick up the current gossip and rumors of failure.

"Catch me negotiating bills for Claparon & Co., my boy. The bank collector went round to return their acceptances to them this morning," said a fat banker in his outspoken way. "If you have any of their paper, lookout!"

Claparon was in the building, in deep consultation with a man well known for the ruinous rate at which he loaned money. Castanier went forthwith in search of the said Claparon, a merchant who had a reputation for taking heavy risks that meant wealth or utter ruin. The money-lender walked away as Castanier came up. A gesture betrayed the speculator's despair.

"Well, Claparon, the bank wants a hundred thousand francs of you, and it is four o'clock; the thing is known, and it is too late to arrange your little failure comfortably," said Castanier.

"Sir!"

"Speak lower," the cashier went on. "How if I were to propose a piece of business that would bring you in as much money as you require?"

"It would not discharge my liabilities; every business that I ever heard of wants a little time to simmer in."

"I know of something that will set you straight in a moment," answered Castanier; "but first you would have to——"

"Do what?"

"Sell your share of paradise. It is a matter of business like anything else, isn't it? We all hold shares in the great speculation of eternity."

"I tell you this," said Claparon angrily, "that I am just the man to lend you a slap in the face. When a man is in trouble, it is no time to play silly jokes on him."

"I am talking seriously," said Castanier, and he drew a bundle of notes from his pocket.

"In the first place," said Claparon, "I am not going to sell my soul to the devil for a trifle. I want five hundred thousand francs before I strike——"

"Who talks of stinting you?" asked Castanier, cutting him short. "You should have more gold than you could stow in the cellars of the Bank of France."

He held out a handful of notes. That decided Claparon. "Done," he cried; "but how is the bargain to be made?"

"Let us go over yonder, no one is standing there," said Castanier, pointing to a corner of the court.

Claparon and his tempter exchanged a few words, with their faces turned to the wall. None of the onlookers guessed the nature of this by-play, though their curiosity was keenly excited by the strange gestures of the two contracting parties.

When Castanier returned, there was a sudden outburst of amazed exclamation. As in the assembly where the least event immediately attracts attention, all faces were turned to the two men who had caused the sensation, and a shiver passed through all beholders at the change that had taken place in them.

The men who form the moving crowd that fills the Stock Exchange are soon known to each other by sight. They watch each other like players round a card-table. Some shrewd observers can tell how a man will play and the condition of his exchequer from a survey of his face; and the Stock Exchange is simply a vast card-table. Every one, therefore, had noticed Claparon and Castanier. The latter (like the Englishman before him) had been muscular and powerful, his eyes were full of light, his color high. The dignity and power in his face had struck awe into them all; they wondered how old Castanier had come by it; and now they beheld Castanier divested of his power, shrunken, wrinkled, aged, and feeble. He had drawn Claparon out of the crowd with the energy of a sick man in a fever fit; he had looked like an opium-eater during the brief period of excitement that the drug can give; now, on his return, he seemed to be in the condition of utter exhaustion in which the patient dies after the fever departs, or to be suffering from the horrible prostration that follows an excessive indulgence in the delights of narcotics. The infernal power that had upheld him through his debauches had left him, and the body was left unaided and alone to endure the agony of remorse and the heavy burden of sincere repentance. Claparon's troubles every one could guess; but Claparon reappeared, on the other hand, with sparkling eyes, holding his head high with the pride of Lucifer. The crisis had passed from the one man to the other.

"Now you can drop off with an easy mind, old man," said Claparon to Castanier.

"For pity's sake, send for a cab and for a priest; send for

the curate of Saint-Sulpice!" answered the old dragoon, sinking down upon the curbstone.

The words "a priest" reached the ears of several people, and produced uproarious jeering among the stockbrokers, for faith with these gentlemen means a belief that a scrap of paper called a mortgage represents an estate, and the list of fundholders is their Bible.

"Shall I have time to repent?" said Castanier to himself in a piteous voice, that impressed Claparon.

A cab carried away the dying man; the speculator went to the bank at once to meet his bills; and the momentary sensation produced upon the throng of business men by the sudden change on the two faces vanished like the furrow cut by a ship's keel in the sea. News of the greatest importance kept the attention of the world of commerce on the alert; and when commercial interests are at stake, Moses might appear with his two luminous horns, and his coming would scarcely receive the honors of a pun; the gentleman whose business it is to write the market reports would ignore his existence.

When Claparon had made his payments, fear seized upon him. There was no mistake about his power. He went on 'Change again, and offered his bargain to other men in embarrassed circumstances. The devil's bond, "together with the rights, easements, and privileges appertaining thereunto"—to use the expression of the notary who succeeded Claparon—changed hands for the sum of seven hundred thousand francs. The notary in his turn parted with the agreement with the devil for five hundred thousand francs to a building contractor in difficulties, who likewise got rid of it to an iron merchant in consideration of a hundred thousand crowns. In fact, by five o'clock people had ceased to believe in the strange contract, and purchasers were lacking for want of confidence.

At half-past five the holder of the bond was a house-painter, who was lounging by the door of the building in the Rue

Feydeau, where at that time stockbrokers temporarily congregated. The house-painter, simple fellow, could not think what was the matter with him. He "felt all anyhow," so he told his wife when he went home.

The Rue Feydeau, as idlers about town are aware, is a place of pilgrimage for youths who for lack of a mistress bestow their ardent affection upon the whole sex. On the first floor of the most rigidly respectable domicile therein dwelt one of those exquisite creatures whom it has pleased heaven to endow with the rarest and most surpassing beauty. As it is impossible that they should all be duchesses or queens (since there are many more pretty women in the world than titles and thrones for them to adorn), they are content to make a stockbroker or a banker happy at a fixed price. To this good-natured beauty, Euphrasia by name, an unbounded ambition had led a notary's clerk to aspire. In short, the second clerk in the office of Maitre Crottat, notary, had fallen in love with her, as youth at two-and-twenty can fall in love. The scrivener would have murdered the Pope and run amuck through the whole sacred college to procure the miserable sum of a hundred louis to pay for a shawl which had turned Euphrasia's head, at which price her waiting-woman had promised that Euphrasia should be his. The infatuated youth walked to and fro under Madame Euphrasia's windows, like the polar bears in their cage at the Jardin des Plantes, with his right hand thrust beneath his waistcoat in the region of the heart, which he was fit to tear from his bosom, but as yet he had only wrenched at the elastic of his braces.

"What can one do to raise ten thousand francs?" he asked himself. "Shall I make off with the money that I must pay on the registration of that conveyance? Good heavens! my loan would not ruin the purchaser, a man with seven millions! And then next day I would fling myself at his feet and say, 'I have taken ten thousand francs belonging to you, sir; I am twenty-two years of age, and I am in love with Euphrasia

—that is my story. My father is rich, he will pay you back; do not ruin me! Have you not yourself been twenty-two years old and madly in love?' But these beggarly land-owners have no souls! He would be quite likely to give me up to the public prosecutor, instead of taking pity upon me. Good God! if it were only possible to sell your soul to the devil! But there is neither a God nor a devil; it is all nonsense out of nursery tales and old wives' talk. What shall I do?"

"If you have a mind to sell your soul to the devil, sir," said the house-painter, who had overheard something that the clerk let fall, "you can have the ten thousand francs."

"And Euphrasia!" cried the clerk, as he struck a bargain with the devil that inhabited the house-painter.

The pact concluded, the frantic clerk went to find the shawl, and mounted Madame Euphrasia's staircase; and as (literally) the devil was in him, he did not come down for twelve days, drowning the thought of hell and of his privileges in twelve days of love and riot and forgetfulness, for which he had bartered away all his hopes of a paradise to come.

And in this way the secret of the vast power discovered and acquired by the Englishman, the offspring of Mathurin's brain, was lost to mankind; and the various Orientalists, mystics, and archæologists who take an interest in these matters were unable to hand down to posterity the proper method of invoking the devil, for the following sufficient reasons:

On the thirteenth day after these frenzied nuptials the wretched clerk lay on a pallet bed in a garret in his master's house in the Rue Saint-Honoré. Shame, the stupid goddess who dares not behold herself, had taken possession of the young man. He had fallen ill; he would nurse himself; misjudged the quantity of a remedy devised by the skill of a practitioner well known on the walls of Paris, and succumbed

to the effects of an overdose of mercury. His corpse was as black as a mole's back. A devil had left unmistakable traces of its passage there; could it have been Ashtaroth?

"The estimable youth to whom you refer has been carried away to the planet Mercury," said the head clerk to a German demonologist who came to investigate the matter at first hand.

"I am quite prepared to believe it," answered the Teuton.

"Oh!"

"Yes, sir," returned the other. "The opinion you advance coincides with the very words of Jacob Boehme. In the forty-eighth proposition of 'The Threefold Life of Man,' he says that 'if God hath brought all things to pass with a LET THERE BE, the FIAT is the secret matrix which comprehends and apprehends the nature which is formed by the spirit born of Mercury and of God.'"

"What do you say, sir?"

The German delivered his quotation afresh.

"We do not know it," said the clerks.

"Fiat?" said the clerk. "*Fiat lux!*"

"You can verify the citation for yourselves," said the German. "You will find the passage in the 'Treatise of the Threefold Life of Man,' page 75; the edition was published by M. Mignaret in 1809. It was translated into French by a philosopher who had a great admiration for the famous shoemaker."

"Oh! he was a shoemaker, was he?" said the head clerk.

"In Prussia," said the German.

"Did he work for the King of Prussia?" inquired a Bœotian of a second clerk.

"He must have vamped up his prose," said a third.

"That man is colossal," cried the fourth, pointing to the Teuton.

That gentleman, though a demonologist of the first rank, did not know the amount of deviltry to be found in a

notary's clerk. He went away without the least idea that they were making game of him, and fully under the impression that the young fellows regarded Boehme as a colossal genius.

"Education is making strides in France," said he to himself.

PARIS, *May* 6, 1835.

THE RED HOUSE.

(*L'Auberge rouge.*)

To Monsieur le Marquis de Custine.

ONCE upon a time (I forget the exact year) a Parisian banker, who had very extensive business relations with Germany, gave a dinner party in honor of one of the friends that merchants make in this place and that by correspondence, a sort of friendship that subsists for a long while between men who have never met. The friend, the senior partner of some considerable firm in Nuremberg, was a stout, good-natured German, a man of learning and of taste, more particularly in the matter of tobacco pipes. He was a typical Nuremberger, with a pleasant, broad countenance and a massive, square forehead, with a few stray fair hairs here and there; a typical German, a son of the stainless and noble Fatherland, so fertile in honorable characters, preserving its manners uncorrupted even after seven invasions. The stranger laughed simply, listened attentively, and drank with marked enjoyment, seeming to like champagne perhaps as well as the pale red wines of the Johannisberg. Like nearly every German in nearly every book, he was named Hermann; and in the quality of a man who does nothing with levity, he was comfortably seated at the banker's table, eating his way through the dinner with the Teutonic appetite renowned all over Europe, and thorough indeed was his manner of bidding adieu to all the works of the great Carême.

The master of the house had invited several intimate friends to do honor to his guest. These were for the most part capitalists or merchants, interspersed with a few pretty and agreeable women, whose light, graceful talk and frank manner

harmonized with German openheartedness. And, indeed, if you could have seen, as I had the pleasure of seeing, this blithe gathering of folk who had sheathed the active claws employed in raking-in wealth, that they might make the best of an opportunity of enjoying the pleasures of life, you would scarcely have found it in your heart to grudge high rates of interest or to revile defaulters. A man cannot always be in mischief. Even in the society of pirates, for instance, there must surely be a pleasant hour now and then when you may feel at your ease beneath the black flag.

"Oh, I do hope that before M. Hermann goes he will tell us another dreadful, thrilling German story!"

The words were uttered over the dessert by a pale, fair-haired young lady, who had doubtless been reading Hoffmann's tales and Sir Walter Scott's novels. She was the banker's only daughter, an irresistibly charming girl, whose education was being finished at the Gymnase; she was wild about the plays given there. The dinner party had just reached the period of lazy content and serene disinclination to talk that succeeds an excellent dinner in the course of which somewhat heavy demands have been made upon the digestion; when the guests lean back in their chairs and play idly with the gilded knife-blades, while their wrists repose lightly on the table edge; the period of decline when some torment apple pips, or knead a crumb of bread between thumb and finger, when the sentimental write illegible initials among the *débris* of the dessert, and the penurious count the stones on their plates, and arrange them round the edge, as a playwright marshals the supernumeraries at the back of the stage. These are minor gastronomical pleasures which Brillat-Savarin has passed over unnoticed, exhaustively as he has treated his subject in other respects.

The servants had disappeared. The dessert, like a squadron after an action, was quite disorganized, disarrayed, forlorn. In spite of persistent efforts on the part of the mistress of the

house, the various dishes strayed about the table. People fixed their eyes on the Swiss views that adorned the gray walls of the dining-room. No one felt it tedious. The man has yet to be found who can mope while he digests a good dinner. At that time we like to sit steeped in an indescribable calm, a sort of golden mean between the two extremes of the thinker's musings and the sleek content of the ruminating brute, which should be termed the physical melancholy of gastronomy.

So the party turned spontaneously towards the worthy German, all of them delighted to listen to a tale, even if it should be a dull one. During this beatific pause, the mere sound of the voice of the one who tells the story is soothing to our languid senses; it is one more aid to passive enjoyment. As an amateur of pictures, I watched the faces, bright with smiles, lit up by the light of the tapers and flushed with good-cheer; the different expressions produced piquant effects among the sconces, the porcelain baskets of fruit, and the crystal glasses.

One face, exactly opposite, particularly struck my imagination. It belonged to a middle-sized man, tolerably stout and jovial-looking; who, from his manner and appearance, seemed to be a stockbroker, and, so far as one could see, gifted with no extraordinary amount of brains. Hitherto I had not noticed him, but at that moment his face, obscured, to be sure, by a bad light, seemed to me to undergo a total change; it took a cadaverous hue, veined with purple streaks. You might have taken it for the ghastly countenance of a man in the death agony. Impassive as a painted figure in a diorama, he was staring stupidly at the facets of a crystal decanter-stopper, but he certainly took no heed of them; he seemed to be deep in some visionary contemplation of the future or of the past. A long scrutiny of this dubious-looking face made me think.

"Is he ill?" I asked myself. "Has he taken too much wine? Is he ruined by the fall of the funds? Is he thinking

how to cheat his creditors? Look!" I said to a lady who sat next to me, calling her attention to the stranger's face, "that is a budding bankruptcy, is it not?"

"Oh!" she answered, "if it were, he would be in better spirits." Then, with a graceful toss of her head, she added: "If that individual ever ruins himself, I will take the news to Pekin myself. He is a rather eccentric old gentleman worth a million in real estate; he used to be a contractor to the imperial armies. He married again as a business speculation, but he makes his wife very happy for all that. He has a pretty daughter, whom for a very long time he would not recognize; but when his son died by a sad accident in a duel, he was obliged to take her home, for he was not likely to have any more children. So all at once the poor girl became one of the richest heiresses in Paris. The loss of his only son threw the poor dear man into great grief, and he still shows signs of it at times."

As she spoke the army-contractor looked up, and our eyes met; his expression made me shudder, it was so gloomy and so sad. Assuredly a whole life was summed up in that glance. Then in a moment he looked cheerful. He took up the glass stopper, put it unthinkingly into the mouth of the water decanter that stood on the table in front of him, and turned smilingly towards M. Hermann. The man was positively beaming with full-fed content, and had, no doubt, not two ideas in his head; he had been thinking of nothing! I was to some extent ashamed to have thrown away my powers of divination *in anima vili*, to have taken this thick-skulled capitalist as a subject. But while I was making my phrenological observations in pure waste, the good-natured German had flicked a few grains of snuff off his face and begun his story.

It would be a somewhat difficult matter to give it in the same words, with his not infrequent interruptions and wordy digressions; so I have written it after my own fashion, omitting

these defects of the Nuremberger's narrative, and helping myself to such elements of poetry and interest as it may possess, emulating the modesty of other writers who omit the formula: "Translated from the German," from their title-pages.

I. THE IDEA AND THE DEED.

"Towards the end of Vendémiaire, in the year VII. of the Republican era (a date that corresponds to the 20th of October, present style), two young men were making their way towards Andernach, a little town on the left bank of the Rhine, a few leagues from Coblentz. The travelers had set out from Bonn that morning, and now the day was drawing to a close. At that particular time a French army under command of General Augereau was keeping in check the Austrians on the right bank of the river. The headquarters of the Republican division were at Coblentz, and one of the demi-brigades belonging to Augereau's corps was quartered in Andernach.

"The two wayfarers were Frenchmen. At first sight of their blue and white uniforms, with red velvet facings, their sabres, and, above all, their caps covered with green oilcloth and adorned with a tricolor cockade, the German peasants themselves might have known them for a pair of army surgeons, men of science and of sterling worth, popular for the most part not only in the army, but also in the countries occupied by French troops. At that time many young men of good family, torn from their medical studies by General Jourdan's conscription law, not unnaturally preferred to continue their studies on the battlefield to compulsory service in the ranks, a life ill suited to their antecedents and unwarlike ambitions. Men of this stamp, studious, serviceable, peaceably inclined, did some good among so many evils, and found

congenial spirits among the learned of the various countries invaded by the ruthless affranchisement of the Republic.

"These two, provided with a route of the road, and with assistant surgeons' commissions signed by La Coste and Bernadotte, were on their way to join the demi-brigade to which they were attached. Both belonged to well-to-do families in Beauvais, and traditions of gentle breeding and of provincial integrity had been a part of their inheritance. A curiosity quite natural in youth had brought them to the seat of war before the time fixed for entrance on active service, and they had come by the *diligence* as far as Strasbourg. Maternal prudence had suffered them to leave home with a very scanty supply of money, but they felt rich in the possession of a few louis; and, indeed, at a time when assignats had reached the lowest point of depreciation, those few louis meant wealth, for gold was at a high premium.

"The two assistant surgeons, aged twenty years at most, gave themselves up to the romance of their situation with all the enthusiasm of youth. They had traversed the Palatinate from Strasbourg to Bonn in the quality of artists, philosophers, and observers. When we have a scientific career before us, there are, in truth, at that age many natures within us; and even while making love or traveling about, an assistant surgeon should be laying the foundations of his future fame and fortune. Accordingly, the pair had been carried away by the profound admiration that every well-read man must feel at the sight of the scenery of Swabia and the banks of the Rhine between Mayence and Cologne. They saw a vigorous and fertile country, an undulating green landscape full of strong contrasts and memories of feudal times, and everywhere scarred by fire and sword. Louis XIV. and Turenne once before laid that fair land in ashes; heaps of ruins bear witness to the pride, or, it may be, to the prudence of the monarch of Versailles, who rased the wonderful castles which once were the glory of this part of Germany. You arrive at some con-

ception of the German mind; you understand its dreaminess and its mysticism from this wonderful forest-land of theirs, full of remains of the middle ages, picturesque, albeit in ruins.

"The two friends had made some stay in Bonn with two objects in view—scientific knowledge and pleasure. The grand hospital of the Gallo-Batavian army and of Augereau's division had been established in the Electoral palace itself, and thither the two novices had gone to see their comrades, to deliver letters of recommendation to their chiefs, and to make their first acquaintance with the life of army surgeons. But with the new impressions, there as elsewhere, they parted with some of their national prejudices, and discovered that France had no monopoly of beautiful public buildings and landscapes. The marble columns that adorn the Electoral palace took them by surprise; they admired the magnificence of German architecture and found fresh treasures of ancient and modern art at every step.

"Now and again in the course of their wanderings towards Andernach their way led them over some higher peak among the granite hills. Through a clear space in the forest, or a chasm in the rocks, they caught a glimpse of the Rhine, a picture framed in the gray stone, or in some setting of luxuriant trails of green leaves. Every valley, field-path, and forest was filled with autumn scents that conduce to musings and with signs of the aging of the year; the tree-tops were turning golden, taking warmer hues and shades of brown; the leaves were falling, but the sky was blue and cloudless overhead; the roads were dry, and shone like threads of gold across the country in the late afternoon sunlight.

"Half a league from Andernach, the country through which the two friends were traveling lay in a silence as deep as if there were no war laying waste the beautiful land. They were following a goat track among the steep crags of bluish granite that rise like walls above the eddying Rhine, and before very long were descending the sloping sides of the ravine above

the little town, nestling coyly at its foot on the river bank, its picturesque quay for the Rhine boatmen.

"'Germany is a very beautiful country!' cried one of the two, Prosper Magnan by name, as he caught sight of the painted houses of Andernach lying close together like eggs in a basket, among the trees and flower-gardens.

"For a few minutes they looked at the high-pitched roofs with their projecting beams, at the balconies and wooden staircases of all those peaceful dwellings, and at the boats swaying in the currents by the quay."

When M. Hermann mentioned the name of Prosper Magnan, my opposite neighbor, the army-contractor, snatched up the decanter, poured himself out a glass of water, and drank it down at a gulp. This proceeding called my attention to him; I thought I saw a slight quiver in his hands and a trace of perspiration on his forehead.

"What is the army-contractor's name?" I inquired of my gracious neighbor.

"His name is Taillefer," said she.

"Are you feeling unwell?" I exclaimed, as this unaccountable being turned pale.

"Not at all, not at all," he said, with a courteous gesture of acknowledgment. "I am listening," he said, with a nod to the rest of the party, for all eyes were turned at once upon him.

"I forget the other young man's name," said M. Hermann. "But, at any rate, from Prosper Magnan's confidences I learned that his friend was dark, lively, and rather thin. If you have no objection, I will call him Wilhelm for the sake of clearness in the story." And the good German took up his tale again, again baptizing a French assistant surgeon with a German name, totally regardless of local color and of the demands of romanticism.

"So by the time these two young fellows reached Andernach night had fallen; and they, fancying that it was too late to

report themselves to their chiefs, make themselves known and obtain billets in a place already full of soldiers, made up their minds to spend their last night of freedom in an inn, about a hundred paces outside the town. They had seen it from the crags above, and had admired the warm colors of the house, heightened by the glow of the sunset. The whole building was painted red, and produced a piquant effect in the landscape, whether it was seen against the crowd of houses in the town, or as a mass of bright color against a background of forest trees, or a patch of scarlet by the gray water's edge. Doubtless the inn owed its external decoration, and consequently its name, to the whim of the builder in some forgotten time. The color had come to be literally a matter of custom to successive owners, for the inn had a name among the Rhine boatmen who frequented it. The sound of horses' hoofs brought the landlord of the Red House to the threshold.

"'*Pardieu!* gentlemen,' cried he, 'a little later you would have had to sleep out of doors like most of your countrymen bivouacking yonder at the other end of Andernach. The house is full. If you positively must have a bed to sleep in, I have only my own room to offer you. As for the horses, I can lay down some litter in a corner of the yard for them; my stables are full of christened men this day. You gentlemen are from France?' he went on after a brief pause.

"'From Bonn,' cried Prosper, 'and we have had nothing to eat since morning.'

"'Oh! as to victuals,' said the landlord, jerking his head, 'people come to the Red House for ten leagues round for wedding feasts. You shall have a banquet fit for a prince, fish from the Rhine! That tells you everything.'

"When they had given over their tired beasts into the host's care, they left him to shout in vain for the stable folk, and went into the public room of the inn. It was so full of dense white clouds blown from the pipes of a roomful of smokers that at first they could not make out what kind of

company they had fallen among; but after they had sat for a while at a table, and put in practice the patience of traveled philosophers who know when it is useless to make a fuss, they gradually made out the inevitable accessories of a German inn. The stove, the clock, the tables, pots of beer and long pipes, loomed out through the tobacco smoke; so did the faces of the motley crew, Jews, Germans, and whatnot, with one or two rough boatmen thrown in.

"The epaulettes of a few French officers shone through the thick mist, and spurs and sabres clanked incessantly upon the flagstones. Some were playing at cards, the rest quarreled among themselves, or were silent, ate, or drank, and came or went. A stout little woman, who wore the black velvet cap, blue stomacher embroidered with silver, the pin-cushion, bunch of keys, silver clasps, and plaited hair of the typical German landlady (a costume made so familiar in all its details by a host of prints that it is too well known to need description), came to the two friends and soothed their impatience, while she stimulated their interest in their supper with very remarkable skill.

"Gradually the noise diminished, the travelers went off one by one, the clouds of tobacco smoke cleared away. By the time that the table was set for the assistant surgeons, and the classic carp from the Rhine appeared, it was eleven o'clock, and the room was empty. Through the stillness of the night it was possible to hear faint noises of horses stamping or crunching their provender, the ripple of the Rhine, the vague indefinable sounds in an inn full of people when every one has retired to rest. Doors and windows opened or shut; there was an inarticulate murmur of voices, or a name was called out in some room overhead. During this time of silence and of commotion, while the two Frenchmen were eating their supper and the landlord engaged in extolling Andernach, the meal, his Rhine wine, his wife, and the Republican army, for the benefit of his guests, the three

heard, with a certain degree of interest, the hoarse shouts of boatmen and the rattling sound of a boat being moored alongside the quay. The innkeeper, doubtless accustomed to be hailed by the guttural cries of the boatmen, hurried out, and soon came in again with a short, stout man, a couple of the boat's crew following them with a heavy valise and several packages. As soon as the baggage was deposited in the room, the short man picked up his valise and seated himself without ceremony at the table opposite the two surgeons.

"'You can sleep on board,' said he to the boatmen, 'as the inn is full. All things considered, that will be the best way.'

"'All the provisions I have in the house are here before you, sir,' said the landlord, and he indicated the Frenchmen's supper. 'I have not a crust of bread, and not so much as a bone——'

"'And no sauerkraut?'

"'Not so much as would fill my wife's thimble! As I had the honor of telling you just now, you can have no bed but the chair you are sitting on, and this is the only unoccupied room.'

"At these words the short personage glanced at the landlord, at the room, and at the two Frenchmen, caution and alarm equally visible in the expression of his countenance.

"At this point," said M. Hermann, interrupting himself, "I should tell you that we never knew this stranger's real name, nor his history; we found out from his papers that he came from Aix-la-Chapelle, that he had assumed the name of Walhenfer, and owned a rather large pin-factory somewhere near Neuwied—that was all.

"He wore, like other manufacturers in that part of the world, an ordinary cloth overcoat, waistcoat, and breeches of dark-green velvet, high boots, and a broad leather belt. His face was perfectly round, his manners frank and hearty, and during the evening he found it very difficult to disguise some

inward apprehensions, or, it may be, cruel anxieties. The innkeeper always said that the German merchant was flying the country, and I learned later on that his factory had been burned down through one of the unlucky accidents so frequent in time of war. But in spite of the uneasy look that his face generally wore, its natural expression denoted good-humor and good-nature. He had good features, and a particularly noticeable personal trait was a thick neck, so white in contrast with a black cravat, that Wilhelm jokingly pointed it out to Prosper——"

Here M. Taillefer drank another glass of water.

"Prosper courteously invited the merchant to share their supper, and Walhenfer fell to without more ado, like a man who is conscious that he can repay a piece of civility. He set down his valise on the floor, put his feet upon it, took off his hat, drew his chair to the table, and laid down his gloves beside him, together with a pair of pistols, which he carried in his belt. The landlord quickly laid a cover for him, and the three began to satisfy their hunger silently enough.

"The room was so close and the flies so troublesome that Prosper besought the landlord to open the window that looked out upon the quay to let in fresh air. This window was fastened by an iron bar that dropped into a socket on either side of the window frame, and for greater security a nut fastened to each of the shutters received a bolt. It so happened that Prosper watched the landlord unfasten the window.

"But since I am going into these particulars," M. Hermann remarked, "I ought to describe the internal arrangements of the house; for the whole interest of the story depends on an accurate knowledge of the place.

"There were two entrance doors in the room where these three personages were sitting. One opened on to the road that followed the river bank to Andernach, and, as might be expected, just opposite the inn, there was a little jetty where

the boat which the merchant had hired for his voyage was moored at that moment. The other door gave admittance to the inn-yard, a court shut in by very high walls, and at the moment full of horses and cattle, for human beings occupied the stables.

"The house-door had been so carefully bolted and barred that, to save time, the landlord had opened the street-door of the sitting-room to admit the merchant and the boatmen, and now, when he had opened the window at Prosper Magnan's instance, he set to work to shut this door, slipping the bolts and screwing the nuts.

"The landlord's bedroom, where the friends were to sleep, was next to the public room of the inn, and only separated from the kitchen, where the host and hostess were probably to pass the night, by a sufficiently thin partition wall. The maidservant had just gone out to find a nook in some manger, or in the corner of a hayloft somewhere or other. It will be readily understood that the public room, the landlord's bedroom, and the kitchen were in a manner apart from the rest of the inn. The deep barking of two great dogs in the yard indicated that the house had vigilant and wakeful guardians.

"'How quiet it is, and what a glorious night!' said Wilhelm, looking out at the sky when the landlord had bolted the door. There was not a sound to be heard at the moment save the rippling of the water.

"'Gentlemen,' said the merchant, addressing the Frenchmen, 'allow me to offer you a bottle or two of wine to wash down your carp. A glass will refresh us after a tiring day. By the look of you and the condition of your clothes, I can see that, like myself, you have come a good way.'

"The two friends accepted the proposal, and the landlord went out through the kitchen to the cellar, doubtless situated beneath that part of the establishment. About the time that five venerable bottles appeared upon the table, the landlord's wife had finished serving the supper. She gave a housewife's

glance over the dishes and round the room, assured herself that the travelers had everything they were likely to want, and went back to the kitchen. The four boon companions, for the host was asked to join the party, did not hear her go off to bed; but before long, in the pauses of the chat over the wine, there came an occasional very distinct sound of snoring from the loft above the kitchen where she was sleeping, a sound rendered still more resonant by reason of the thin plank floor. This made the guests smile, and the landlord smiled still more.

"Towards midnight, when there was nothing left on the table but cheese and biscuits, dried fruit, and good wine, the whole party, and the young Frenchmen more particularly, grew communicative. They talked about their country, their studies, and the war. After a while the conversation grew lively. Prosper Magnan drew tears to the merchant's eyes when, with a Picard's frankness and the simplicity of a kindly and affectionate nature, he began to imagine what his mother would be doing while he, her son, was here on the bank of the Rhine.

"'It is just as if I can see her,' he said; 'she is reading the evening prayer, the last thing at night! She will not forget me I know; she is sure to say, "Where is my poor Prosper, I wonder?" Then if she has won a few sous at cards—of *your* mother perhaps,' he added, jogging Wilhelm's elbow—'she will be putting them in the big red jar, where she keeps the money she is saving up to buy those thirty acres that lie within her own little bit of land at Lescheville. The thirty acres will be worth something like sixty thousand francs. Good meadow land it is! Ah! if I were to have it some day, I would live all the rest of my life at Lescheville, and want nothing better! How often my father wanted those thirty acres and the nice little stream that winds along through the fields! And, after all, he died and could not buy the land. I have played there many and many a time!'

"'M. Walhenfer, haven't you also your *hoc erat in votis?*' asked Wilhelm.

"'Yes, sir, yes! But it all came to me as it was, and now ——' the good man stopped short and said no more.

"'For my own part,' said the landlord, whose countenance was slightly flushed, 'I bought a bit of meadow last year that I had set my mind on these ten years past.'

"So they chatted on, as folk will talk when wine has unloosed their tongues, and struck up one of those travelers' friendships that we are a little chary of making on a journey, in such a way that when they rose to go to their room Wilhelm offered his bed to the merchant.

"'You can take the offer without hesitation,' he said, 'for Prosper and I can sleep together. It will not be the first time nor the last either, I expect. You are the oldest among us, and we ought to honor old age.'

"'Pooh!' said the landlord, 'there are several mattresses on our bed, one can be laid on the floor for you,' and he went to shut the window with the usual clatter caused by this precaution.

"'I accept your offer,' said the merchant, addressing Wilhelm. 'I confess,' he added, lowering his voice, and looking at the friends, 'that I wanted you to make it. I feel that I cannot trust my boatmen; and I am not sorry to find myself in the company of two decent young fellows, two French military men, moreover, for the night. I have a hundred thousand francs in gold and diamonds in that valise.'

"The two younger men received this incautious communication with a discreet friendliness that reassured the worthy German. The landlord helped his guests to shift one of the mattresses, and, when things had been arranged as comfortably as possible, wished them good-night and went off to bed. The merchant and the surgeons joked each other about their pillows. Prosper put Wilhelm's case of surgical instruments, as well as his own, under the mattress, to raise the end

and supply the place of a bolster, just as Walhenfer, in an excess of extreme caution, bestowed his valise in a like manner.

"'We are both going to sleep on our fortunes—you on your money, and I on my case of instruments! It remains to be seen whether my case will bring me in as much money as you have made.'

"'You may hope so,' said the merchant. 'Honest work will accomplish most things, but you must have patience.'

"Before very long Walhenfer and Wilhelm fell asleep. But whether it was because his bed was too hard, or he himself was overtired and wakeful, or through some unlucky mood of mind, Prosper Magnan lay wide awake. Imperceptibly his thoughts took an ill turn. He could think of nothing but that hundred thousand francs beneath the merchant's pillow. For him a hundred thousand francs was a vast fortune ready made. He began by laying out the money in endless ways, building castles in the air, as we are all apt to do with so much enjoyment just before we drop off to sleep, when indistinct and hazy ideas arise in our minds, and not seldom night and silence give a magical vividness to our thoughts.

"In these visions Prosper Magnan overtopped his mother's ambitions; he bought the thirty acres of meadow, and married a young lady in Beauvais, to whose hand he could not aspire at present owing to inequality of fortune. With this wealth he planned out a whole pleasant lifetime, saw himself the prosperous father of a family, rich, looked up to in the neighborhood, possibly even mayor of Beauvais. The Picard head was on fire; he cast about for the means of realizing these dreams of his. With extraordinary warmth of imagination he set himself to plan out a crime, and gold and diamonds were the most vivid and distinct portion of a vision of the merchant's death; the glitter dazzled him. His heart beat fast. He had committed a crime, no doubt, by harboring such thoughts as these. The spell of the gold was upon him; his

moral nature was intoxicated by insidious reasonings. He asked himself whether there was any reason why the poor German should live, and imagined how it would have been if he had never existed. To put it briefly, he plotted out a way to do the deed with complete impunity.

"The Austrians held the other bank of the Rhine; a boat lay there under the windows; there were boatmen there; he could cut the man's throat, fling him into the Rhine, escape with the valise through a casement, bribe the boatmen, and go over to the Austrian side. He even went so far as to count upon his surgeon's dexterity with the knife; he knew of a way of decapitating his victim before the sleeper could utter a single shriek."

M. Taillefer wiped his forehead at this point, and again he drank a little water.

"Then Prosper Magnan rose—slowly and noiselessly. He assured himself that he had awakened nobody, dressed and went into the public room. Then, with the fatal lucidity of mind that suddenly comes at certain crises, with the heightened power of intuition and strength of will that is never lacking to criminals or to prisoners in the execution of their designs, he unscrewed the iron bars, and drew them from their sockets, and set them against the wall without the slightest sound, hanging with all his weight on to the shutters lest they should creak as they turned on their hinges. In the pale moonlight he could dimly see the objects in the room where Wilhelm and Walhenfer were sleeping.

"Then, he told me, he stopped short for a moment. His heart beat so hard and so heavily that the sound seemed to ring through the room, and he stood like one dismayed as he heard it. He began to fear for his coolness; his hands shook, he felt as if he were standing on burning coals. But so fair a prospect depended upon the execution of his design that he saw something like a providence in this dispensation of fate that had brought the merchant thither. He opened the win-

dow, went back to his room, took up his case, and looked through it for an instrument best adapted to his purpose.

"'And when I stood by the bed' (he told me this), 'I asked God for His protection, unthinkingly.'

"He had just raised his arm, and was summoning all his strength for the blow, when something like a voice cried within him, and he thought he saw a light. He flung down the surgical instrument on his bed, fled into the next room, and stood at the window. A profound horror of himself came over him, and feeling how little he could trust himself, fearing to yield to the fascination that held him, he sprang quickly out of the window and walked along by the Rhine, acting as sentinel, as it were, before the inn. Again and again he walked restlessly to and from Andernach, often also his wanderings led him to the slope of the ravine which they had descended that afternoon to reach the inn; but so deep was the silence of the night, and so strong his dread of arousing the watch-dogs, that he kept away from the Red House, and lost sight altogether more than once of the window that he had left open. He tried to weary himself out, and so to induce sleep. Yet, as he walked to and fro under the cloudless sky, watching the brilliant stars, it may be that the pure night air and the melancholy lapping of the water wrought upon him and restored him by degrees to moral sanity. Sober reason completed the work and dispelled that short-lived madness. His education, the precepts of religion, and, above all things (so he told me), visions of the homely life that he had led beneath his father's roof, got the better of his evil thoughts. He thought and pondered for long, his elbow resting on a boulder by the side of the Rhine; and when he turned to go in again, he could not only have slept, so he said, but have watched over millions of gold.

"When his honesty emerged strengthened and triumphant from that ordeal, he knelt in joy and ecstasy to thank God; he felt as happy, light-hearted, and contented as on the day

when he took the sacrament for the first time, and felt not unworthy of the angels because he had spent the day without sin in thought, or word, or deed.

"He went back again to the inn, shut the window without care to move noiselessly, and went to bed at once. Mind and body were utterly exhausted, and sleep overcame him. He had scarcely laid his head on the mattress before the dreamy drowsiness that precedes sound slumber crept over him; when the senses grow torpid, conscious life ebbs away, thought grows fragmentary, and the last communications of sense to the brain are like the impressions of a dream.

"'How close the air is!' said Prosper to himself. 'It is just as if I were breathing a damp mist——'

"Dimly he sought to account for this state of things by attributing it to the difference between the outside temperature in the pure country air and the closed room; but before long he heard a constantly recurring sound, very much like the slow drip of water from a leaking tap. On an impulse of panic terror, he thought of rising and calling the landlord, or the merchant, or Wilhelm; but, for his misfortune, he bethought himself of the wooden clock in the next room, fancied that the sound was the beat of the pendulum, and dropped off to sleep with this dim and confused idea in his head."

"Do you want some water, M. Taillefer?" asked the master of the house, seeing the banker take up the empty decanter mechanically.

M. Hermann went on with his story after the slight interruption of the banker's reply.

"The next morning," he went on, "Prosper Magnan was awakened by a great noise. It seemed to him that he had heard shrill cries, and he felt that violent nervous tremor which we experience when we wake to a painful sensation that began during slumber. The thing that takes place in us when we 'wake with a start,' to use the common expression,

has been insufficiently investigated, though it presents interesting problems to physiological science. The terrible shock, caused it may be by the too sudden reunion of the two natures in us that are almost always apart while we sleep, is usually momentary, but it was not so for the unlucky young surgeon. The horror grew, and his hair bristled hideously all at once, when he saw a pool of blood between his own mattress and Walhenfer's bedstead. The unfortunate German's head was lying on the floor, the body was still on the bed, all this blood had drained from the neck. Prosper Magnan saw Walhenfer's eyes unclosed and staring, saw red on the sheets that he had slept in, and even on his own hands, saw his own surgeon's knife on the bed, and fainted away on the blood-stained floor.

"'I was punished already for my thoughts,' he said to me afterwards.

"When he came to himself again, he was sitting in a chair in the public room of the inn, a group of French soldiers round about him, and an inquisitive and interested crowd. He stared in dull bewilderment at a Republican officer who was busy taking down the depositions of several witnesses and drawing up an official report; he recognized the landlord and his wife, the two boatmen, and the maidservant. The surgical instrument used by the murderer——"

Here M. Taillefer coughed, drew out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his forehead. His movements were so natural that I alone noticed them; indeed, all eyes were fixed on M. Hermann with a kind of greedy interest. The army-contractor leaned his elbow on the table, propped his head on his right hand, and looked fixedly at Hermann. From that time forward I saw no involuntary signs of agitation nor of interest in the tale, but his face was grave and corpse-like; he looked just as he had done while he was playing with the decanter-stopper.

"The surgical instrument used by the murderer lay on the

table, beside the case with Prosper's pocket-book and papers. The crowd looked by turns at the young surgeon and at these convincing proofs of his guilt; he himself appeared to be dying; his dull eyes seemed to have no power of sight in them. A confused murmur outside made it evident that a crowd had gathered about the inn, attracted by the news of the murder, and perhaps by a wish to catch a sight of the criminal. The tramp of the sentries posted under the windows and the clanking of their weapons rose over the whispered talk of the populace. The inn itself was shut up, the courtyard was silent and deserted.

"The gaze of the officer who was drawing up the report was intolerable; Prosper Magnan felt some one grasp his hand; looked up to see who it was that stood by him among that unfriendly crowd, and recognized, by the uniform that he wore, the senior surgeon of the demi-brigade quartered in Andernach. So keen and merciless were those eyes that the poor young fellow shuddered, and his head dropped on to the back of the chair. One of the men held vinegar for him to inhale, and Prosper regained consciousness at once; but his haggard eyes were so destitute of life and intelligence that the senior surgeon felt his pulse, and spoke to the officer:

"'Captain,' he said, 'it is impossible to examine the man just now——'

"'Very well. Take him away,' returned the captain, cutting the surgeon short, and speaking to a corporal who stood behind the junior's chair.

"'Confounded scoundrel!' the man muttered; 'try at least to hold up your head before these German beggars, to save the honor of the Republic.'

"Thus adjured, Prosper Magnan came to his senses, rose, and went forward a few paces; but when the door opened, when he felt the outer air, and saw the people crowding up, all his strength failed him, his knees bent under him, he tottered.

"'The confounded sawbones deserves to be put an end to twice over! March, can't you!' said the two men on either side of him, on whom he leaned.

"'Oh, the coward! the coward! Here he comes! here he comes! There he is!'

"The words were uttered as by one voice, the clamorous voice of the mob who hemmed him in, insulting and reviling him at every step. During the time that it took to go from the inn to the prison, the trampling feet of the crowd and the soldiers who guarded him, the muttered talk of those about him, the sky above, the morning air, the streets of Andernach, the rippling murmur of the current of the Rhine, all reached him as dull, vague impressions, confused and dim, like all his experiences since his awakening. At times he thought that he had ceased to exist, so he told me afterwards.

"I myself was in prison just then," said M. Hermann, interrupting himself. "We are all enthusiasts at twenty. I was on fire to defend my country, and commanded a volunteer troop raised in and about Andernach. A short time previously, I managed to fall in one night with a French detachment of eight hundred men. There were two hundred of us at the most; my scouts had betrayed me. I was thrown into the prison at Andernach while they debated whether or no to have me shot by way of a warning to the country. The French, moreover, talked of reprisals, but the murder for which they had a mind to avenge themselves on me turned out to have been committed outside the Electorate. My father had obtained a reprieve of three days, to make application for my pardon to General Augereau, who granted it.

"So I saw Prosper Magnan as soon as I came into the prison at Andernach, and the first sight of him filled me with the deepest pity for him. Haggard, exhausted, and blood-stained though he was, there was a certain frankness in his face that convinced me of his innocence, and made a deep

impression upon me. It was as if Germany stood there visibly before me—the prisoner with the long, fair hair and blue eyes was for my imagination the very personification of the prostrate Fatherland—this was no murderer, but a victim. As he went past my window, a sad, bitter smile lit up his face for a moment, as if a transitory gleam of sanity crossed a disordered brain. Such a smile would surely not be seen on a murderer's lips. When I next saw the turnkey, I asked him about his new prisoner.

"'He hasn't said a word since he went into his cell. He sits there with his head on his hands, and sleeps or thinks about his trouble. From what I hear the Frenchmen saying, they will settle his case to-morrow, and he will be shot within twenty-four hours.'

"That evening I lingered a little under his windows during the short time allowed for exercise in the prison-yard. We talked together, and he told me very simply the story of his ill-luck, giving sufficiently straightforward answers to my different questions. After that conversation I no longer doubted his innocence. I asked and obtained the favor of spending a few hours in his company, and saw him in this way several times. The poor boy let me into the secret of his thoughts without reserve. In his own opinion, he was at once innocent and guilty. He remembered the hideous temptation which he had found strength to resist, and was afraid that he had committed the murder planned while he was awake in an access of somnambulism.

"'But how about your companion?' said I.

"'Oh, Wilhelm is incapable!——' he cried vehemently. He did not even finish the sentence. I grasped his hand at the warm-hearted outburst, so fraught with youth and virtue.

"'I expect he was frightened when he woke,' he said; 'he must have lost his presence of mind and fled——'

"'Without waking you?' I asked. 'Why, in that case

your defence is soon made, for Walhenfer's valise will not have been stolen.'

"All at once he burst into tears.

"'Oh, yes, yes!' he cried; 'I am not guilty. I cannot have killed him. I remember the dreams I had. I was at school, playing at prisoners-base. I could not have cut his throat while I was dreaming of running about.'

"But in spite of the gleams of hope that quieted his mind somewhat at times, he still felt crushed by the weight of remorse. There was no blinking the fact he had raised his arm to strike the blow. He condemned himself, and considered that he was morally guilty after committing the crime in imagination.

"'And yet, I am not a bad fellow,' he cried. 'Oh, poor mother! Perhaps just now she is happily playing at cards with her friends in the little tapestried room at home. If she knew that I had so much as raised my hand to take another man's life—Oh! it would kill her! And I am in prison, and accused of murder! If I did not kill the man, I shall certainly be the death of my mother!'

"He shed no tears as he spoke. In a wild fit of frenzy, not uncommon among Picards, he sprang up, and, if I had not forcibly restrained him, would have dashed his head against the wall.

"'Wait until you have been tried,' I said. 'You will be acquitted; you are innocent. And your mother——'

"'My mother,' he cried wildly; 'my mother will hear that I have been accused of murder, that is the main point. You always hear things like that in little places, and my poor mother will die of grief. Besides, I am not innocent. Do you care to know the whole truth! I feel that I have lost the virginity of my conscience.'

"With those terrible words, he sat down, folded his arms across his chest, bowed his head, and fixed his eyes gloomily on the floor. Just then the turnkey came to bid me return to

my cell; but loth to leave my companion when his discouragement seemed at its blackest, I clasped him in a friendly embrace. 'Be patient,' I said, 'perhaps it will all come right. If an honest man's opinion can silence your doubts, I tell you this—that I esteem you and love you. Accept my friendship and repose on my heart, if you cannot feel at peace with your own.'

"On the following day, about nine o'clock, a corporal and four fusiliers came for the assistant surgeon. I heard the sound of the soldiers' footsteps, and went to the window; our eyes met as he crossed the court. Never shall I forget the glance fraught with so many thoughts and forebodings, nor the resignation and indescribably sad and melancholy sweetness in his expression. In that dumb swift transference of thought my friend conveyed his testament to me; he left his lost life to the one friend who was beside him at the last.

"That night must have been very hard to live through, a very lonely night for him; but perhaps the pallor that overspread his face was a sign of a newly-acquired stoicism, based on a new view of himself. Perhaps he felt purified by remorse, and thought to expiate his sin in this anguish and shame. He walked with a firm step; and I noticed that he had removed the accidental stains of blood that soiled his clothing the night before.

"'Unluckily I stained my hands while I was asleep; I always was an uneasy sleeper,' he had said, a dreadful despair in the tones of his voice.

"I was told that he was about to be tried by a court-martial. The division was to go forward in two days' time, and the commandant of the demi-brigade meant to try the criminal on the spot before leaving Andernach.

"While that court-martial was sitting, I was in an agony of suspense. It was noon before they brought Prosper Magnan back to prison. I was taking my prescribed exercise when he came; he saw me, and rushed into my arms.

"'I am lost!' he said. 'Lost beyond hope! Every one here must look on me as a murderer——'

"Then he raised his head proudly. 'This injustice has completely given me back my innocence,' he said. 'If I had lived, my life must always have been troubled, but my death shall be without reproach. But is there anything beyond?'

"The whole eighteenth century spoke in that sudden questioning. He was absorbed in thought.

"'But what did you tell them? What did they ask you?' I cried. 'Did you not tell them the simple truth as you told it to me?'

"He gazed at me for a minute, then after the brief, dreadful pause, he answered with a feverish readiness of speech—

"'First of all they asked me—"Did you go out of the inn during the night?" "Yes," I told them. "How did you get out?" I turned red, and answered, "Through the window." "Then you must have opened it?" "Yes," I said. "You set about it very cautiously; the landlord heard nothing!" I was like one stupefied all the time. The boatmen swore that they had seen me walking, sometimes towards Andernach, sometimes towards the forest. I went to and fro many times, they said. I had buried the gold and diamonds. As a matter of fact, the valise has not been found. Then, the whole time, I myself was struggling against remorse. Whenever I opened my mouth to speak, a merciless voice seemed to cry, "*You meant to do it!*" Everything was against me, even myself! They wanted to know about my comrade, and I completely exonerated *him*. Then they said, "One of you four must be guilty—you or your comrade, the innkeeper or his wife. All the doors and windows were shut fast this morning!" When they said that,' he went on, 'I had no voice, no strength, no spirit left in me. I was more sure of my friend than of myself; I saw very well that they thought us both equally guilty of the murder, and I was the clumsier one of the two. I tried to explain the thing by somnam-

bulism; I tried to clear my friend; then I got muddled, and it was all over with me. I read my sentence in the judges' eyes. Incredulous smiles stole across their faces. That is all. The suspense is over. I am to be shot to-morrow—— I do not think of myself now,' he said, 'but of my poor mother.'

"He stopped short and looked up to heaven. He shed no tears; his eyes were dry and contracted with pain.

"Frédéric!

"Ah! I remember now! The other one was called Frédéric—Frédéric! Yes, I am sure that was the name," M. Hermann exclaimed triumphantly.

I felt the pressure of my fair neighbor's foot; she made a sign to me, and looked across at M. Taillefer. The sometime army-contractor's hand drooped carelessly over his eyes, but through the fingers we thought we saw a smouldering blaze in them.

"Eh?" she said in my ear, "and now suppose that his name is Frédéric?"

I gave the lady a side glance of entreaty to be silent. Hermann went on with his tale.

"'It is cowardly of Frédéric to leave me to my fate. He must have been afraid. Perhaps he is hiding in the inn, for both our horses were there in the yard that morning. What an inexplicable mystery it is!' he added, after a pause. 'Somnambulism, somnambulism! I never walked in my sleep but once in my life, and then I was not six years old. And I am to go out of this,' he went on, striking his foot against the earth, 'and take with me all the friendship that there is in the world! Must I die twice over, doubting the friendship that began when we were five years old, and lasted through all our school-life and our student days! Where is Frédéric?'

"The tears filled his eyes. We cling more closely to a sentiment than to our life, it seems!

"'Let us go in again,' he said; 'I would rather be in my

cell. I don't mean them to see me crying. I shall go bravely to my death, but I cannot play the hero in season and out of season, and I confess that I am sorry to leave my life, my fair life, and my youth. I did not sleep last night; I remembered places about my home when I was a child; I saw myself running about in the meadows, perhaps it was the memories of those fields that led to my ruin. I had a future before me' (he interrupted himself). 'A dozen men, a sub-lieutenant who will cry, "Ready! present! fire!" a roll of drums, and disgrace! that is my future now! Ah! there is a God, there is a God, or all this would be too nonsenical.'

"Then he grasped my arm, put his arms about me and held me tightly to him.

"'Ah! you are the last human soul to whom I can pour out my soul. *You* will be free again! You will see your mother! I do not know whether you are rich or poor, but no matter for that, you are all the world for me. They cannot keep the fighting up forever. Well and good then, when they make peace, go to Beauvais. If my mother survives the disastrous news of my death, you will find her out and tell her "He was innocent," to comfort her. She will believe you,' he went on. 'I shall write to her as well, but you will carry my last look to her; you shall tell her how that you were the last friend whom I embraced before I died. Ah! how she will love you, my poor mother, you who have stood my friend at the last!' He was silent for a moment or two, the burden of his memories seemed too heavy for him to bear. 'Here they are all strangers to me,' he said, 'the other surgeons and the men, and they all shrink from me in horror. But for you, my innocence must remain a secret between me and heaven.'

"I vowed to fulfill his last wishes as a sacred charge. He felt that my heart went out to him, and was touched by my words. A little later the soldiers came back to take him before the court-martial again. He was doomed.

"I know nothing of the formalities or circumstances that

attend a sentence of this kind; I do not know whether there is any appeal, nor whether the young surgeon's defense was made according to rule and precedent, but he prepared to go to his death early on the morrow, and spent that night in writing to his mother.

"'We shall both be set free to-day,' he said, smiling, when I went the next day to see him. 'The general has signed your pardon, I hear.'

"I said nothing, and gazed at him to engrave his features on my memory.

"A look of loathing crossed his face, and he said, 'I have been a miserable coward! All night long I have been praying the very walls for mercy,' and he looked round his cell. 'Yes, yes,' he went on, 'I howled with despair, I rebelled against this, I have been through the most fearful inward conflict. I was alone! Now I am thinking of what others will say of me—Courage is like a garment that we put on. I must go decently to my death. And so——'"

II. A DOUBLE RETRIBUTION.

"Oh! do not tell us any more!" cried the girl who had asked for the story, cutting short the Nuremberger. "I want to live in suspense, and to believe that he was saved. If I were to know to-night that they shot him, I should not sleep. You must tell me the rest to-morrow."

We rose. M. Hermann offered his arm to my fair neighbor, who asked as she took it, "They shot him, did they not?"

"Yes. I was there."

"What, monsieur, you could——"

"He wished it, madame. It is something very ghastly to attend the funeral of a living man, your own friend who is not guilty of the crime laid to his charge. The poor young fellow

never took his eyes off me. He seemed to have no life but mine left. 'He wished,' he said, 'that I should bear his last sigh to his mother.'"

"Well, and did you see her?"

"After the Peace of Amiens I went to France to take the glad tidings, 'He was innocent!' That pilgrimage was like a sacred duty laid upon me. But Mme. Magnan was dead, I found; she had died of consumption. I burned the letter I had brought for her, not without deep emotion. Perhaps you will laugh at my German high-flown sentimentality; but for me there was a tragedy most sublimely sad in the eternal silence which was about to swallow up those farewells uttered in vain from one grave to another grave, and heard by none, like the cry of some traveler in the desert surprised by a beast of prey."

Here I broke in with a "How if some one were to bring you face to face with one of the men in this drawing-room, and say, 'There is the murderer!' would not that be another tragedy? And what would you do?"

M. Hermann took up his hat and went.

"You are acting like a young man, and very thoughtlessly," said the lady. "Just look at Taillefer; there he sits in a low chair by the fire, Mademoiselle Fanny is handing him a cup of coffee; he is smiling. How could a murderer display such quiet self-possession as that, after a story that must have been torture to him? He looks quite patriarchal, does he not?"

"Yes; but just ask him if he has been with the army in Germany!" I exclaimed.

"Why not?" and with the audacity rarely lacking in womankind when occasion tempts or curiosity gets the better of her, my fair neighbor went across to the army-contractor.

"Have you been in Germany, M. Taillefer?" quoth she.

Taillefer all but dropped his saucer.

"I, madame? No, never."

"Why, what is that your are saying, Taillefer?" protested

the banker, chiming in. "You were in the Wagram campaign, were you not—on the victualing establishment?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Taillefer; "I was there, that once."

"You are wrong about him; he is a good sort of man," decided the lady when she came back to me.

"Very well," said I to myself, "before this evening is over I will drive the murderer out of the mire in which he is hiding."

There is a phenomenon of consciousness that takes place daily beneath our eyes, so commonplace that no one notices it, and yet there are astounding depths beneath it. Two men meet in a drawing-room who have some cause to disdain or to hate each other; perhaps one of them knows something which is not to the credit of the other; perhaps it is a condition of things that is kept a secret; perhaps one of them is meditating a revenge; but both of them are conscious of the gulf that divides them, or that ought to divide them. Before they know it, they are watching each other and absorbed in each other; some subtle emanation of their thought seems to distil from every look and gesture; they have a magnetic influence. Nor can I tell which has the more power of attraction—revenge or crime, hatred or contempt. Like some priest who cannot consecrate the house where an evil spirit abides, the two are ill at ease and suspicious; one of them, it is hard to say which, is polite, and the other sullen; one of them turns pale or red, and the other trembles, and it often happens that the avenger is quite as cowardly as the victim. For very few of us have the nerve to cause pain, even if it is necessary pain, and many a man passes over a matter or forgives from sheer hatred of fuss or dread of making a tragical scene.

With this intersusceptibility of minds, and apprehensiveness of thought and feeling, there began a mysterious struggle between the army-contractor and myself. Ever since my interruption of M. Hermann's story he had shunned my eyes.

Perhaps in like manner he looked none of the party in the face. He was chatting now with the inexperienced Fanny, the banker's daughter; probably, like all criminals, he felt a longing to take shelter with innocence, as if the mere proximity of innocence might bring him peace for a while. But though I stood on the other side of the room, I still listened to all that he said; my direct gaze fascinated him. When he thought he could glance at me in turn, unnoticed, our eyes met, and his eyelids fell directly. Taillefer found this torture intolerable, and hastened to put a stop to it by betaking himself to a card-table. I backed his opponent, hoping to lose my money. It fell out as I had wished. The other player left the table, I cut in, and the guilty man and I were now face to face.

"Monsieur," I said, as he dealt the cards, "will you be so good as to begin a fresh score?" He swept his counters from right to left somewhat hastily. The lady, my neighbor at dinner, passed by; I gave her a significant glance.

"M. Frédéric Taillefer," I asked, addressing my opponent, "are you related to a family in Beauvais with whom I am well acquainted?"

"Yes, sir." He let the cards fall, turned pale, hid his face in his hands, begged one of his backers to finish the game for him, and rose.

"It is too warm here," he gasped; "I am afraid——"

He did not finish his sentence. An expression of horrible anguish suddenly crossed his face, and he hurried out of the room, the master of the house following him with what appeared to be keen anxiety. My neighbor and I looked at each other, but her face was overcast by indescribable sadness; there was a tinge of bitterness in it.

"Is your behavior very merciful?" she asked, as I rose from the card-table, where I had been playing and losing. She drew me into the embrasure of the window as she spoke. "Would you be willing to accept the power of reading all

hearts if you could have it? Why interfere with man's justice or God's? We may escape the one; we shall never escape the other. Is the prerogative of a president of a court of assize so enviable? And you have all but done the executioner's office as well——"

"After sharing and stimulating my curiosity," I said, "you are lecturing me!"

"You have made me think," she answered.

"So it is to be peace to scoundrels and woe to the unfortunate, is it? Let us down on our knees and worship gold! But shall we change the subject?" I said with a laugh. "Please look at the young lady who is just coming into the room."

"Well?"

"I met her three days ago at a ball at the Neapolitan embassy, and fell desperately in love. For pity's sake, tell me who she is. No one could tell me——"

"This is Mlle. Victorine Taillefer!"

Everything swam before my eyes; I could scarcely hear the tones of the speaker's voice.

"Her stepmother brought her home only a while ago from the convent where she has been finishing her education somewhat late.——For a long time her father would not recognize her. She comes here to-day for the first time. She is very handsome—and very rich!"

A sardonic smile went with the words. Just as she spoke, we heard loud cries that seemed to come from an adjoining room; stifled though they were, they echoed faintly through the garden.

"Is not that M. Taillefer's voice?" I asked. We both listened intently to the sounds, and fearful groans reached our ears. Just then our hostess hurried towards us and closed the window.

"Let us avoid scenes," she said to us. "If Mlle. Taillefer were to hear her father, it would be quite enough to send her into a fit of hysterics."

The banker came back to the drawing-room, looked for Victorine, and spoke a few low words in her ear. The girl sprang at once towards the door with an exclamation, and vanished. This produced a great sensation. The card-parties broke up; every one asked his neighbor what had happened. The buzz of talk grew louder, and groups were formed.

"Has M. Taillefer——?" I began.

"Killed himself?" put in my sarcastic friend. "You would wear mourning for him with a light heart, I can see."

"But what can have happened to him?"

"Poor man!" (it was the lady of the house who spoke) "he suffers from a complaint—I cannot recollect the name of it, though M. Brousson has told me about it often enough—and he has just had a seizure."

"What kind of complaint is it?" asked an examining magistrate suddenly.

"Oh, it is something dreadful," she answered; "and the doctors can do nothing for him. The agony must be terrible. Taillefer had a seizure, I remember, once, poor man, when he was staying with us in the country; I was obliged to go to a neighbor's house so as not to hear him; his shrieks are fearful; he tries to kill himself; his daughter had to have him put into a strait waistcoat and tied down to his bed. Poor man! he says there are live creatures in his head gnawing his brain; it is a horrible, sawing, shooting pain that throbs through every nerve. He suffers so fearfully with his head that he did not feel the blisters that they used to apply at one time to draw the inflammation; but M. Brousson, his present doctor, forbade this; he says that it is nervous inflammation, and puts leeches on the throat, and applies laudanum to the head; and, indeed, since they began this treatment the attacks have been less frequent; he seldom has them oftener than once a year, in the late autumn. When he gets over one of these seizures, Taillefer always says that he would rather be broken on the wheel than endure such agony again."

"That looks as if he suffered considerably!" said a stockbroker, the wit of the party.

"Oh! last year he very nearly died," the lady went on. "He went alone to his country-house on some urgent business; there was no one at hand perhaps, for he lay stiff and stark, like one dead, for twenty-two hours. They only saved his life by a scalding hot bath."

"Then is it some kind of tetanus?" asked the stockbroker.

"I do not know," returned she. "He has had the complaint nearly thirty years; it began while he was with the army. He says that he had a fall on a boat, and a splinter got into his head, but Brousson hopes to cure him. People say that in England they have found out a way of treating it with prussic acid, and that you run no risks——"

A shrill cry, louder than any of the preceding ones, rang through the house. The blood ran cold in our veins.

"There!" the banker's wife went on, "that is just what I was expecting every moment. It makes me start on my chair and creep through every nerve. But—it is an extraordinary thing!—poor Taillefer, suffering such unspeakable pain as he does, never runs any risk of his life! He eats and drinks as usual whenever he has a little respite from that ghastly torture——Nature has such strange freaks. Some German doctor once told him that it was a kind of gout in the head; and Brousson's opinion was pretty much the same."

I left the little group about our hostess and went out with Mlle. Taillefer. A servant had come for her. She was crying.

"*Oh mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" she sobbed; "how can my father have offended heaven to deserve such suffering as this? So kind as he is."

I went down stairs with her, and saw her into the carriage; her father was lying doubled up inside it. Mlle. Taillefer tried to smother the sound of her father's moaning by covering his mouth with a handkerchief. Unluckily, he saw me,

and his drawn face seemed further distorted, a scream of agony rent the air, he gave me a dreadful look, and the carriage started.

That dinner party and the evening that followed it was to exercise a painful influence on my life and on my views. Honor and my own scruples forbade me to connect myself with a murderer, no matter how good a husband and father he might be, and so I must needs fall in love with Mlle. Taillefer. It was wellnigh incredible how often chance drew me to visit at houses where I knew I might meet Victorine. Again and again, when I had pledged myself to renounce her society, the evening would find me hovering about her. The pleasures of this life were immense. It gave the color of an illicit passion to this unforbidden love, and a chimerical remorse filled up the measure of my bliss. I scorned myself when I greeted Taillefer, if by accident he was with his daughter; but, after all, I bowed to him.

Unluckily, in fact, Victorine, being something more than a pretty girl, was well read, charming, and gifted in no small degree, without being in the least a blue-stocking, without the slightest taint of affectation. There is a certain reserve in her light talk and a pensive graciousness about her that no one could resist. She liked me, or, at any rate, she allowed me to think so; there was a certain smile that she kept for me; for me the tones of her voice grew sweeter still. Oh! she cared about me, but she worshiped her father; she would praise his kindness to me, his gentleness, his various perfections, and all her praises were like so many daggers thrust into my heart.

At length I all but became an accessory after the fact, an accomplice in the crime which had laid the foundation of the wealth of the Taillefers. I was fain to ask for Victorine's hand. I fled. I traveled abroad. I went to Germany and to Andernach. But I came back again, and Victorine was

looking thinner and paler than her wont. If she had been well and in good spirits, I should have been safe; but now the old feeling for her was rekindled with extraordinary violence.

Fearing lest my scruples were degenerating into monomania, I resolved to convene a Sanhedrim of consciences that should not have been tampered with, and so to obtain some light on this problem of the higher morality and philosophy. The question had only become more complex since my return.

So the day before yesterday I assembled those among my friends whom I looked upon as notably honest, scrupulous, and honorable. I asked two Englishmen, a secretary to the embassy and a Puritan; a retired Minister, in the character of matured worldly wisdom; a few young men still under the illusions of inexperiences; a priest, an elderly man; my old guardian, a simple-hearted being, who gave me the best account of his management of my property that ever trustee has been known to give in the annals of the Palais; an advocate, a notary, and a judge—in short, all social opinions were represented and all practical wisdom. We had begun by a good dinner, good talk, and a deal of mirth; and over the dessert I told my story plainly and simply (suppressing the name of my lady-love), and asked for sound counsel.

"Give me your advice," I said to my friends as I came to an end. "Go thoroughly into the question as if it were a point of law. I will have an urn and billiard balls brought round, and you shall vote for or against my marriage, the secrecy of the ballot shall be scrupulously observed."

Deep silence prevailed all at once. Then the notary declined to act.

"There is a contract to draw up," he alleged.

Wine had had a quieting effect on my guardian; indeed, it clearly behooved me to find a guardian for *him* if he was to reach his home in safety.

"I see how it is!" I said to myself. "A man who does not give me an opinion is telling me pretty forcibly what I ought to do."

There was a general movement round the table. A landowner, who had subscribed to a fund for putting a headstone to General Foy's grave and providing for his family, exclaimed—

"'Even, as virtue, crime hath its degrees.'"

"The babbler," said the Minister in a low voice, as he nudged my elbow.

"Where is the difficulty?" asked a duke, whose property consisted of lands confiscated from Protestants after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

The advocate rose to his feet.

"In law," opined the mouthpiece of justice, "the case before us presents no difficulty whatever. Monsieur le Duc is right! Is there not a statute of limitations? Begin to inquire into the origins of a fortune, and where should we all of us be? This is a matter of conscience, and not of law. If you must drag the case before some tribunal, the confessional is the proper place in which to hear it."

And the Code incarnate, having said his say, sat down and drank a glass of champagne. The man intrusted with the interpretation of the Gospel, the good priest, spoke next.

"God has made us weak," he said with decision. "If you love the criminal's heiress, marry her; but content yourself with her mother's property, and give her father's money to the poor."

"Why, in all likelihood the father only made a great match because he had made money first," cried one of the pitiless quibblers that you meet with everywhere. "And it is just the same with every little bit of good fortune—it all came of his crime!"

"The fact that the matter can be discussed is enough to decide it! There are some things which a man cannot weigh

and ponder," cried my guardian, thinking to enlighten the assembly by this piece of drunken gravity.

"True!" said the secretary to the embassy.

"True!" exclaimed the priest, each meaning quite differently.

A doctrinaire, who escaped being elected by a bare hundred and fifty votes out of a hundred and fifty-five, rose next.

"Gentlemen," said he, "this phenomenal manifestation of the intellectual nature is one of the most strongly marked instances of an exception to the normal condition of things, the rules which society obeys. The decision, therefore, on an abnormal case should be an extemporaneous effort of the conscience, a sudden conception, a delicate discrimination of the inner consciousness, not unlike the flashes of insight that constitute perception in matters of taste. Let us put it to the vote."

"Yes, let us put it to the vote," cried the rest of the party.

Each was provided with two billiard-balls—one white, the other red. White, the color of virginity, was to proscribe marriage; red to count in favor of it. My scruples prevented me from voting. My friends being seventeen in number, nine made a decisive majority. We grew excited and curious as each dropped his ball into the narrow-mouthed wicker basket, which holds the numbered balls when players draw for their places at pool, for there was a certain novelty in this process of voting by ballot on a nice point of conduct. When the basket was turned out there were nine white balls. To me this did not come as a surprise; but it occurred to me to count up the young men of my own age among this court of appeal. There were exactly nine of these casuists; one thought had been in all their minds.

"Aha!" I said to myself, "there was a unanimous feeling against the marriage in their minds, and a no less unanimous verdict in favor of it among the rest! Here is a fix, and how am I to get out of it?"

"Where does the father-in-law live?" one of my school-fellows, less crafty and far-sighted than the rest, carelessly asked.

"There is no longer a father-in-law in the case!" I exclaimed. "A while ago my conscience spoke sufficiently plain to make your verdict superfluous. And if it speaks more uncertainly to-day, here are the inducements that led me to waver. Here is the tempter—this letter that I received two months ago; and I drew a card from my pocket-book and held it up:

"'*You are requested to be present,*' so it ran, '*at the funeral and burial service of*

M. JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC TAILLEFER,

of the firm of Taillefer and Company, sometime contractor of provisions to the Army, late Chevalier of the Legion of Honor and of the Order of the Golden Spur, Captain of the First Company of Grenadiers of the National Guard, Paris: who died on May 1st, at his house in the Rue Joubert. The interment will take place," and so forth, and so forth. '*On behalf of,*' and so forth.

"What am I to do now?" I continued. "I will just put the question roughly before you. There is unquestionably a pool of blood on Mlle. Taillefer's estates. Her father's property is one vast *Aceldama.* Granted! But, then, Prosper Magnan has no representatives, and I could not find any traces of the family of the pin-maker who was murdered that night at Andernach. To whom should the fortune be returned? And ought it all to be returned? Have I any right to betray a secret discovered by accident, to add a severed human head to an innocent girl's marriage portion, to give her ugly dreams,